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Beatriz Cifuentes Feliciano

BODH GAYĀ:

***A Study of the Site of the Buddha's Enlightenment
and the Related Collections in the Victoria and Albert and British Museum***

MA by Research, South Asian Archaeology and Museum Studies

Department of Archaeology

Durham University

2013

ABSTRACT

'BODH GAYĀ: A Study of the Site of the Buddha's Enlightenment and the Related Collections in the Victoria and Albert and British Museum'

Beatriz Cifuentes Feliciano

Bodh Gayā is recognised as the place of the Buddha's Enlightenment and has been a site of religious activity for the last 2,300 years. There are significant architectural, sculptural and archaeological remains from this entire time span. The contention of this dissertation is that key elements of the Mahābodhi complex and key finds collected from the location have been left unstudied, leading to confused and partial conclusions about the site's history. Erroneous conclusions in relation to the Bodhi Tree, the temple's erection and the nature of mediaeval pilgrimage routes round Bodh Gayā are contested in the thesis through re-examination of the literature available, a focused study of the archaeological and sculptural collections in London (British Museum and V&A) and a thorough analysis of unpublished photographic material from the Cunningham collection. The latter, largely unstudied, provides new information about the state of the site in the 19th century. Collectively, these materials shed light on the development of the Mahābodhi over the centuries and help assess the impact of the restoration works carried out by the Burmese and the British. The British interventions effectively saw Bodh Gayā regain its position as an important centre of modern Buddhism. Numerous assumptions about the temple's history were translated into its architecture and written into the scholarly literature in ways that have subsequently inspired the available writing on Bodh Gayā. This thesis aims to provide a critical revision of the Mahābodhi's history through the careful study of the materials available.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
BG	Bodh Gayā
BL	The British Library
BM	The British Museum
IM	India Museum
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work described in this thesis was carried out by me, in the Department of Archaeology, University of Durham and at the Victoria and Albert and British Museums. I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged.

(Beatriz Cifuentes Feliciano)

STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

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NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTIONS

The transliteration employed for words in Indic and other languages follows, as far as possible, the standard modern scholarly system. Diacritic marks have been used for Sanskrit words, early Indian names and for writing Bodh Gayā. For technical terms mentioned in historical texts or inscriptions, I use the spelling in the original documents. I have consistently attempted to use the most common spelling for words and terms from inscriptions.

Introduction

Bodh Gayā, the subject of this thesis, is located 110 km south of Patna, the capital of the Indian state of Bihār (see Figs. I and II). Bodh Gayā (BG) is one of the main Buddhist sites, being accepted as the place where Buddha gained Enlightenment (see Fig. III). It has, as a consequence, been a site of religious activity for the past 2,300 years. BG's art historical heritage includes materials from this entire time span, with the oldest monumental remains dating to the Aśokan period. It also boasts significant architectural, sculptural and archaeological material from all the main phases of Indian history, especially the mediaeval or Pāla period.

History of Research

Collections made at BG are shared across many museums in India, Europe and, to a lesser extent, America. This presents a challenge to research. In London, where most of the material is found, a general overview of the data is impaired by the distribution between the British Museum (BM), the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) and the British Library (BL), and further divisions according to department within these institutions. The departments are: Prints and Drawings and Manuscripts at the BL, Oriental Antiquities and Coins and Medals at the BM, and the Asian Department at the V&A, including its offsite storage facilities in Dean Hill Park, Salisbury.

Despite this organizational dispersal and the methodological problems it brings, BG has been a focus of academic interest for the past 130 years. Key contributions are Rājendralāl Mitra's *Buddha Gaya* published in 1878.¹ This was the first mayor compilation on the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment and aims to give a general history of the complex. Mitra's publication was followed by Alexander Cunningham's *Mahābodhi* written based on the excavations undertaken between the 1860s and the early 1880s.² The text was prepared in London after 1885 and published in 1892. *Mahābodhi* was written from memory after Cunningham's original manuscript was lost with the sinking of the *Indus*.³ While the report was written by the excavator, Cunningham was seldom present at the site during the process

¹ Rājendralāl Mitra, *Buddha Gaya: the Great Buddhist Temple, the Hermitage of Sakya Muni* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972).

² Alexander Cunningham, *Mahābodhi: or the Great Buddhist Temple under the Bodhi tree at Buddha-Gaya* (London: Allen, 1892).

³ For more information on the sinking of the *Indus* see: (a) Michael Willis, *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), p.8 and (b) V&A, Registrar Paper, MA/1/C109 (V&A) for A.H. Gile's letter in relation to objects IS.238 to 248-1950.

and the re-composition of the text came a decade after the excavation and restoration of the temple complex, with few notes to hand. This accounts for many of the inaccuracies in the book. Regardless of the methodological problems posed by Mitra's and Cunningham's publications, they have remained central to the subject.

After a considerable hiatus, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy undertook a detailed study of the stone railing in 1935 in his *La Sculpture de BodhGayā*.⁴ The chronology of this sculpture was later revisited by Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty in *Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gayā*.⁵ Otherwise materials from the site are covered only in wider surveys, notably *Art of Eastern India* by Frederick Asher,⁶ and Susan L. Huntington's *Pāla-Sena Schools and Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*.⁷ Claudine Bautze-Picron produced a catalogue of the Eastern Indian pieces in Berlin that was centred partly on the objects from BG.⁸ No parallel study or publication exists for the more complex London collections.

After Cunningham, the first site-specific study was *BodhGayā, the Site of Enlightenment*, edited by Janice Leoshko in 1988 and containing a collection of papers by Frederick M. Asher, Robert L. Brown and others.⁹ This was followed by Leoshko's monograph *Sacred Traces*, published in 2003.¹⁰ This historiographically reflective study surveys the discovery of Buddhism and its geography, as seen through colonial eyes, but does not present new material or probe the archaeology of the site. The same approach is elaborated in *BodhGayā Jataka*, edited by David Geary and Matthew R. Sayers in 2012, with new work from Abhishek Singh Amar and others.¹¹ Amar is the first scholar to consider the wider archaeological landscape of BG and undertake extensive field surveys of the region in which the Mahābodhi is set. This is coupled with an innovative theoretical model that provides a framework for understanding the contested nature of the religious milieu and the dialectical interaction of

⁴ Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *La Sculpture de BodhGayā* (Paris: Les Éditions d'Art et d'Histoire, 1935).

⁵ Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty, *Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gayā* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997).

⁶ Frederick M. Asher, *The Art of Eastern India, 300-800* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

⁷ Susan L. Huntington, *The Pāla-Sena Schools of Sculpture* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984); and Susan L. Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree: the Art of Pāla India (8th-12th centuries) and its International Legacy* (Dayton: Dayton Art Institute in association with the University of Washington Press, 1990).

⁸ Claudine Bautze-Picron, *The Art of Eastern India: in the Collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin: Stone & Terracotta Sculptures* (Berlin: Reimer, 1998).

⁹ Janice Leoshko, *BodhGayā, the Site of Enlightenment* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1988).

¹⁰ Janice Leoshko, *Sacred traces: British Exploration of Buddhism in India* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

¹¹ David Geary, Matthew R. Sayers, Abhishek Singh Amar, *Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on a Contested Buddhist Site: BodhGayā Jataka* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

Buddhism and early Hinduism.¹² Amar, however, does not address the complex archaeological problems of the Mahābodhi itself.

This survey of the literature shows that the difficulties posed by the Mahābodhi, its complex layering and, at first sight, baffling arrangement have thwarted or at least discouraged any close analysis. The sole instance is found in an appendix in Verardi's *Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism* (2011).¹³ To date, this is the only attempt to review the evidence provided by Cunningham and other scholars and to assess the nature and history of the temple proper. Verardi's data-set is, however, restricted to the published sources and constrained by theoretical presumptions that have now been discounted by Amar.

Research Topic and Aims

The contention of this dissertation is that key elements of the Mahābodhi complex and key finds collected from the location have been left unstudied and unpublished, leading to confused and partial conclusions about the site's history. In order to address this claim, I carefully looked at the material from BG in London. Reuniting the BM and V&A collections from the site provides a sample that is comprehensive and varied, and therefore sufficient to the task of a critical revision of the Mahābodhi's history. The BM's collection of BG pieces is among the most varied and probably the most diverse in a single institution outside of India. It includes sculptures, photographs and Alexander Cunningham's archaeological finds. The V&A's collection includes numerous examples of votive offerings, reliefs and other sculptures. Many were collected by Caspar Purdon Clarke in the early 1880s or were transferred from the India Museum when that museum's collections were dispersed in 1879. This study of the BM and V&A collections will shed light on erroneous conclusions in relation to the Bodhi Tree, the Mahābodhi temple's erection and the nature of mediaeval pilgrimage routes round BG. Among my tasks in this work are a re-examination of the literature, a focused study of the archaeological and sculptural collections in London and an analysis of the architecture and the unpublished photographic material from the Cunningham collection. These unpublished photographs, sketches and plans detail the British interventions at BG in the late 19th century.

As just noted, the majority of the pieces that make up the London collections were gathered or acquired in the 1880s. The collections therefore have comparable histories and reflect similar collecting strategies, but also present analogous problems. Collectors in the 19th

¹² Abhishek S. Amar, 'Buddhist Responses to Brāhmana Challenges in Medieval India: Bodhgayā and Gayā' in *JRAS*, 3rd series, vol.22,1 (2012).

¹³ Giovanni Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall of Buddhism in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2011).

century focused on typologies and information on the findspots and context of individual pieces was often not recorded. The lack of historical evidence means that it is difficult to place the archaeological material into a historical context with any certainty.

Only one excavation has been carried out at BG since the completion of the restoration works.¹⁴ A trench was dug next to the museum in the archaeological reserve in 1970s but no report was published. The excavation confirmed that the sequence at BG followed other long-established sites in North India, therefore archaeologically corroborating that there was habitation at BG since the early historic period. The sequence for North India was established in the 1950s when B. B. Lal excavated Hastinapur, a site in Uttar Pradesh traditionally associated with the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁵ Although the test pit answered the question whether BG had an Early Historic occupation sequence, further excavations are no doubt required. However these need to be preceded by documentation and comprehensive mapping of the site and the development of precise research questions that the excavation would seek to answer. A model for developing such a question, an exercise generally unknown to Indian archaeology, can be found in the excavation of the Tabbova-Maradanmaduva culture in Nikawewa, by Coningham et al.¹⁶ In this case the unanswered question was the date (and meaning) of well-known types of terracottas from Sri Lanka. A focused campaign of excavation, analysis and publication led to the answers sought, i.e. that the figurines were from the 11th century CE.

Methodology

Following on from the above, my research could be taken as a preliminary to any excavation at BG or, alternatively, as a free-standing project. The first step is to study what we have - a corpus of material - and how it was formed. Over a period of one year I studied: (a) the drawings in the BL; (b) the V&A collection and (c) the BM collection. I spent most of my time working as a Project Curator for the *Radiant Buddha Project*, based between the V&A and BM. After an initial assessment of the materials to be researched and a revision of the literature available on BG, I carried out my research as follows:

(a) In the British Library my work was based in the Asian and African Studies Reading Room and in the adjacent Department of Prints, Drawings and Photographs (Asia, Pacific and Africa

¹⁴ Amar, 'Buddhist Responses to Brāhmana Challenges in Medieval India: Bodhgayā and Gayā'.

¹⁵ B. B. Lal, *Excavations at Hastināpura and other Explorations [in the upper Gangā and Sutlej Basins], 1950-52: new light on the dark age between the end of the Harappā culture and the early historical period* (New Delhi, 1955).

¹⁶ Robin Coningham 'Contextualising the Tabbova-Maradanmaduva 'Culture': Excavations at Nikawewa, Tirappane District, Anuradhapura District, Sri Lanka' in *South Asian Studies*, Vol 28, 1 (2012) pp 1-14.

Collections). After a search on BG in the online catalogue, I identified approximately 60 items of interest. These included drawings, sketches, paintings and photographs dating to the 18th-20th centuries. Given the high resolution images available on the BL website, I only felt the need to request and see 10 items. Over the course of two weeks I attended the Print Room and studied drawings and paintings depicting the Mahābodhi temple and the Bodhi Tree. I also made use of the main Reading Room where I was able to locate books that were unavailable elsewhere.

(b) In the Victoria & Albert Museum I was Project Curator for the *Radiant Buddha Project*, working for the Asian Department in the South Kensington site and in both off-site facilities, Blythe House (Barons Court, London) and Dean Hill Park (Salisbury). Upon my arrival at the V&A, I received training courses in CMS (Collections Management System) and Vadar (the software used for uploading images onto the system), which enabled me to manage, edit and create records. Firstly I searched the department's online records, as well as registrars and other photographic materials, and generated a list of objects from or directly related to BG. The total number of items amounts to just over 110 pieces. Other than the sculptures on display in the galleries, only a few photographs of the Mahābodhi are kept in the South Kensington site. The majority of the medium-sized sculptures are in Blythe House and the larger ones in Dean Hill Park. Therefore, I proceeded to have documentation campaigns in both of these facilities. In Blythe House I photographed, measured and assessed the condition of the sculptures. In Dean Hill Park I led a week-long campaign with the help of four technicians from the Technical Services team, who manoeuvred the machinery necessary to lift the heavier objects. Over 45 BG pieces were photographed for the first time. These items' condition was also evaluated for the Conservation Department.

After studying the history of the collections and completing the documentation campaigns, I proceeded to edit the photographic material and the records of the pieces with the aim to make as much information as possible available online. The final phase of work in the V&A involved the development of a website on Buddhist pilgrimage mainly focused on the BG material. This was done with the help of a web-designer from the Information Systems Services Department and staff from the Photographic Studio (which is part of the Collections Services Division in the Museum).

(c) In the British Museum I worked as a Project Curator for the Asia Department. I was based at the Bloomsbury site where I concentrated my efforts on further developing the research on the BG collections and on studying unpublished materials from the Cunningham collection. These included Cunningham's photographs, sketches and architectural plans detailing the

excavation and restoration works undertaken at BG. I also focused on the archaeological pieces, especially votive objects and the collection of gems found in the Diamond Throne. Having been trained in Merlin (BM's collection management system) and on Digital Assets (image management software), I edited the records of the BG pieces and created records for the Vajrāsana items (which I photographed). Subsequently, I organized several meetings over a time-span of six months with Joanna Whalley, the Senior Metal Conservator and Gemmologist from the V&A's, to analyse and identify with certainty the gems collected by Cunningham. This was a fundamental step that improved my understanding of the medieval pilgrimage networks centred round BG.

In July 2012 I gave a paper at the 21st Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeology and Art (EASAA) at the École du Louvre in Paris. I presented my then on-going research in a paper entitled *Bodh Gayā: Excavating the Collections at the British Museum*, to be published in the proceedings of the conference. Later that year I embarked on a research trip to Eastern India where I visited BG and other holy Buddhist sites in Bihar. As part of that trip, I gave a talk at the Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute of the Patna Museum. I was also the convenor and a speaker in the seminar entitled *Bodh Gayā Study Day*, which was held on June 10th, 2013 at the Asia Study Room in the British Museum. This event brought together specialists on Eastern Indian art from the BM, V&A, BL and other institutions and was a platform to have a cross-disciplinary discussion on the research carried out during the preceding months. New developments that resulted from the study were presented here too. My paper, *Excavating the Collections at the British Museum: Votive Offerings from Bodh Gayā*, was a focused study on votive plaques made of shellac and collected by Cunningham in Bihar.

Structure

Due to the size of the collections in the BM, V&A and BL, my dissertation is organized in the following chapters:

Chapter 1 *Bodh Gaya Archives: British Museum, V&A Museum and British Library* provides a history of the collections studied. It discusses how the materials were gathered in India and transported to England, and details how the collections now found in the BM, V&A and BL came to be. Special emphasis is given to the Cunningham (BM) and Purdon Clarke collections (V&A). This chapter also discusses the impact of the dissolution of the India Museum, London.

Chapter 2 *Bodhi Tree Re-Visited* focuses on the history of the Bodhi tree from the time of the historical Buddha to the 19th century. Through a careful revision of the literature available,

and a close look at the photographic documentation from the time of the Mahābodhi's restoration, the history of the sacred tree and the development of its worship are reviewed.

Chapter 3 *Mahābodhi Temple: Architectural History, Excavations and Restoration* presents an archaeology of the architecture of the Mahābodhi. It discusses the architectural history of the temple, from its early days as a simple shrine, through its development during the Gupta era, its decline and subsequent restorations, and the time of the interventions (excavation and restoration) lead by Cunningham.

Chapter 4 *Sculptures and Material* aims to re-examine important sculptural examples from the Mahābodhi temple and its precincts and provide a chronological overview of the materials. This chronology will serve as a platform to re-evaluate styles, dates and the particular histories of key pieces from BG. The objects from the BM, V&A and BL studied in this dissertation are detailed here.

Chapter 5 *Votive Deposits and Geographical Horizons* is a focused study on the collection of gems from the Vajrāsana or Diamond Throne found by Cunningham during the excavation. A gemmological analysis of these objects helps shed light on geographical connections and pilgrimage networks centred on BG during the medieval period.

Chapter 1— Bodh Gayā Archives: British Museum, V&A Museum and British Library

This thesis *Bodh Gayā: A Study of the Site of the Buddha's Enlightenment and the Related Collections in the Victoria and Albert and British Museum*, is focused on the history of Bodh Gayā (BG), the materials collected at the site, and the restoration works of the Mahābodhi temple. The restoration of the temple was led by Alexander Cunningham and Joseph David Beglar in the late 19th century. Among the materials are those that were collected as work on the temple progressed and later sent to London. These included sculptures, architectural fragments, votive deposits and offerings. A number of unpublished photographs and notes that help document the nature of the British activities at the site are also in London. All these materials are kept in the British Museum (BM), the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) and, to a lesser extent, in the British Library (BL).

A critical review of the literature available, a careful look at the collections held in London (mainly BM and V&A) and a thorough analysis of the unpublished and unresearched materials, will help the assessment of earlier conclusions about the history of the Mahābodhi temple complex while bringing to light unpublished documents.

This chapter will provide a history of the collections of the BG material held in the London institutions. It will present the pieces acquired at the site, while discussing how the collections were gathered and transported. From collecting the pieces in Bihār until their arrival in the British and V&A Museums, this chapter aims to introduce the collections held in these museums and, more importantly, to look at the BG material spread across institutions as a coherent corpus. Sharing the same place of origin and similar histories, the V&A and BM collections are complementary.

The BM's collections from BG go back to the late 19th century, with the Bridge and Cunningham collections constituting the majority of the material. Another important addition were the Indian pieces that arrived after the India Museum closed in 1879; this event and its impact in the collections will be discussed separately, as it affected both the British and South Kensington Museums (now V&A).

The V&A material from BG was collected mainly by Caspar Purdon Clarke in the 1880s in order to make up the perceived deficiencies in their Indian section. Subsequently, important additions to the V&A collections arrived in the early 20th century and in the 1950s, just after the Second World War.

The BL also holds material related to BG. This was previously kept in the Bloomsbury site of the BM. When the BL was formed in 1974 the material entered different departments in the Library. The Indian Office Library, formed from the India Museum Library and dispersed in 1879, joined the BL in the 1990s. The BL materials consist of photographs, drawings and paintings of the Mahābodhi temple.

The BM: Bridge and Cunningham Collections

The Indian collections at the BM are unmatched for their quality, historical importance and iconographic variety. No other museum can boast such a wealth of material or provide such a comprehensive picture of ancient Indian civilisation.¹⁷ Much of the material from BG and neighbouring sites in the BM was collected by Alexander Cunningham in the late 19th century and acquired for the Museum by Augustus Wollaston Franks, Keeper of the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities.¹⁸ A.W. Franks also acquired the Bridge collection, which included stone sculptures and architectural fragments from BG. In addition, Franks negotiated the arrival of the India Museum pieces which were added to the BM collections in 1880. Other minor additions followed in the 20th century.

The number of items that the BM holds from the Mahābodhi site amounts to approximately 245 pieces. These materials are varied, but the collection has an overall archaeological focus.

Bridge Collection. Before A.W. Franks was appointed to work in the BM in 1851, the Museum had very few sculptural examples from India. During the late 18th century, when the first Indian sculpture, a Śiva linga, arrived in 1786, and the first half of the 19th century, only a handful of then contemporary Indian pieces arrived at the BM; some were gifted and others purposely collected. An avid collector, A.W. Franks continued the tradition of acquiring contemporary items. His acquisitions are an indication that Asia's importance was being increasingly appreciated in the latter half of the 19th century.¹⁹

The Bridge Collection, which was put together in India by Charles Stuart, was the first large body of sculptures acquired by A.W. Franks. Stuart went to India at a young age in 1777 and had a long army career. During the years he spent stationed there, he developed an interest in Indian art and culture that led him to collect pieces with the aim of making a visual encyclopaedia of religion and custom. Stuart demonstrated an interest in Indian iconography and gathered examples of deities; he spoke modern Indian languages but not Sanskrit. Stuart,

¹⁷ Michael Willis, "Sculpture from India" in *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-century Collecting and the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p.250.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 258.

¹⁹ For more details see Willis, "Sculpture from India".

although not professing to be a scholar on the matter, managed to put together a comprehensive and large collection of Indian art that was kept in his house in Kolkata. Upon his death in 1828, the collection was sold and the profits of the sale given to his heirs. The entirety of Stuart's materials were packed into 143 cases and sent to England where they went for auction in June 1830. These dates indicate that the material he acquired from BG dates to the early 19th century, a time when Buchanan-Hamilton visited the Mahābodhi temple site.

Most of the Stuart Collection was bought by John Bridge (1755-1834), a partner in Rundell, Bridge and Rudnell, the celebrated goldsmiths.²⁰ What motivated this purchase remains unknown; perhaps Bridge knew Stuart, or Bridge thought the Indian sculptures would go on to become valuable possessions. Whatever the case, Bridge kept the collection on his estate in Shepherd's Bush, then just outside of London, and displayed it in a museum-like manner, much like Stuart had done previously. While on display, some pieces were blackened for a more dramatic effect; this was especially true for the Pāla pieces from BG.

Upon John Bridge's death, the collection passed on to his brother George Bridge. After the latter passed away in 1872, Franks was informed via letter (probably sent by the Bridge family), of the existence of the collection. The letter described it as follows: "a magnificent acquisition to any National Gallery of Antique Sculpture".²¹

The Bridge estate, Wood House, went on sale in the early 1870s probably because at this time the houses in the once upmarket Shepherd's Bush area were devalued due to the arrival of the railway. The Bridge family decided to sell their land to the railway company, which in turn made the decision to tear down the building. The Bridges then needed to sell the collection and vacate Wood House, but it appears no one expressed any interest in acquiring the collection except for Franks.

The Standing Committee of the BM Trustees had decided that if the collection was considered desirable for the Museum, Franks was authorised to accept it. The family agreed that the BM could have the material on the condition that the institution paid for both its removal from Wood House (where some items were mounted with cement on the walls, etc...), and for the transfer of the pieces to the BM's Bloomsbury site. However, the Bridge family simultaneously prepared the pieces in their family museum to be sold at auction, probably as a precaution in case Franks did not get final permission from the Trustees. A catalogue was drafted for the sale, scheduled to take place on the 20th of June 1872, but this

²⁰ Willis, "Sculpture from India", p. 253.

²¹ Ibid, p.253.

never took place. Instead, Franks accepted the Bridge Collection as a gift and reported it to the group of Trustees of the BM on the 11th of July 1872.

The Bridge Collection has approximately 148 pieces, mainly Buddhist and Hindu stone sculptures from India; it also holds includes material from Burma. In terms of its BG pieces, a number of standing figures, Buddha reliefs, stūpas and other architectural fragments from the Mahābodhi are featured in the Bridge collection. One important example is a Pāla standing Buddha (1872,0701.30) which appears to have been collected by Charles Stuart in BG in the first decades of the 19th century.²²

Charles Stuart and his collection illustrate the growing interest in collecting Indian art at the turn of the 19th century; he was a pioneer in the matter. By the 1860s, however, several art collectors were moving around India, acquiring pieces from important sites. Simultaneously, back in London Antonio Panizzi retired from his post as Principal Librarian in the BM in 1866. This departure allowed Franks to proceed with the addition of Indian pieces to the Museum's collections. This, together with the arrival of pieces from India, marked a turning point in the development of the Indian collections and consolidated the BM as an important repository of Indian art.

Cunningham Collection. Another significant contribution to Oriental Antiquities (now Asia Department) from Franks was the collection of Alexander Cunningham (1814-93). His career in India and the nature of his collection was described in detail by Willis as follows:²³

Cunningham had a distinguished military career in India and retired a Major-General. Although he read papers at the Asiatic Society of Bengal from at least the 1840s, it was not until his retirement in 1861 that his archaeological interests flourished. He established the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and as its first Director General toured widely across North India. The results are recorded in his 23-volume Archaeological Survey of India Reports, published between 1861 and 1885. In this extraordinary set of books, Cunningham touched on virtually every area of study, from prehistoric archaeology to the architectural remains of the Delhi Sultanate. Opportunities for the collection of sculpture were great in the second half of the 19th century, but Cunningham was primarily a numismatist and field archaeologist.

²² See Chapter 4 for more information on this piece.

²³ Michael Willis, "Sculpture from India" in *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-century Collecting and the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 258.

Cunningham led together with J.D. Beglar the excavation and the restoration of the Mahābodhi. Cunningham brought this collection to London after his retirement from active duty in 1885 (see Figs. 1.1 and 1.2). He gathered the material during more than 30 years spent in India and shipped it to England together with the manuscript copy of *Mahābodhi*. He divided his personal collection in two and sent it in two vessels; one of them, the Indus, sank and with it half of Cunningham's materials were lost. As mentioned before, Cunningham later had to re-write the *Mahābodhi* book from memory.

Since Cunningham's main interests were archaeology and numismatics, his focus, especially in retirement, was on coins, seals and inscriptions, rather than sculptures and architectural remains. As early as 1857 Cunningham had sold some Indian coins to the BM's Department of Coins and Medals, but his first major gift dates to 1887 when he donated a collection of antiquities. This included stone tools, terracottas, seal impressions, a series of inscribed Buddhist reliquaries excavated at Sāñchī, and small finds from BG and other sites in north India. In 1892 he donated the residue of his archaeological material, while his coin collection arrived after his death in 1894.²⁴

During his time in London, Cunningham was in contact with Franks who often acquired material from him personally. The most notable case was that of the Oxus Treasure which came to Franks in 1887.²⁵ Other material obtained personally by Franks included Cunningham's Indian seals, his notes and photographs of BG, and residual material from the production of Cunningham's book *Mahābodhi*.

The importance of Cunningham's photographs and other documents has grown significantly in recent decades. These materials within the collection were originally given little attention. They were stored in the Museum's archive and seen as supplements to the main collection, but they have now been carefully studied. Most of Cunningham's photographs and notes focus on the Mahābodhi temple in BG that since its restoration in the late 19th century CE has re-emerged as an active religious centre.²⁶ Research on the photographs documenting the restoration process of the temple has illustrated the nature of the works carried on it and

²⁴ Tsering Gonkatsang and Michael Willis, "Tibetan, Burmese and Chinese Inscriptions from Bodhgayā in the British Museum" in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Third Series), 23, pp. 429-439 (2013).

²⁵ Marjorie Caygill and John F. Cherry, *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-century Collecting and the British Museum* (London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press), pp. 231-49.

²⁶ Gongkatsang and Willis, "Tibetan, Burmese and Chinese Inscriptions from Bodhgayā in the British Museum", pp. 429-439 (2013).

helped identify architectural features that have now disappeared. These documents also provide an opportunity to reassess several items held in the Museum.²⁷

The Cunningham collection comprises the majority of the BG material in the BM. It includes a wide range of items: stone sculptures, terracotta plaques, seals, stūpas, offerings in the forms of gemstones, coral, jewellery and coins. It also features a number of largely unpublished documents and photographs, some by Thomas Peppe and J.D. Beglar.²⁸ These documents amount to approximately 104 in number, while the other materials add up to 140 pieces.

The India Museum

The India Museum (IM) was officially established by the proprietors of the East India Company in 1801. It housed specimens and curiosities gathered by officers and servants working for the Company. This Museum was housed in the East India House, in Leadenhall Street, where the headquarters of the Company were located (see Figs. 1.3 and 1.4).

The history of the IM was troubled. The first mention of its collections potentially being transferred to other institutions was recorded in the 1830s. During the 1860s, constant communication once again suggested plans of closing the Museum and relocating its materials, including the Library, to places such as the BM and South Kensington Museums. Nevertheless, the IM resisted changes in its operation and continued to expand its collections, with pieces from India being added after the Great Exhibition (1851) and the French International Exhibition (1855). This resulted in a need for more storage space and subsequently led to the expansion of the IM in 1858. The Museum relocated once again to Fife House, in Whitehall, in 1861 (see Fig. 1.5).²⁹

In 1813 the East India Company lost its monopoly of the India trade. As a consequence of the political events of 1857, the Company was nationalised by the British Government and the Government of India Act of 1858 was passed. This act established the India Office: an entirely new government department responsible for the sub-continent.³⁰ The end of the East India Company affected the IM which was paid for by revenues from India. Dr George Birdwood recognized the problems surrounding the institution. After some debate, Sir Louis Mallet finally asked Birdwood to prepare a plan of action and close the Museum in 1979. On July of

²⁷ Beatriz Cifuentes, "Excavating the Collections at the British Museum: Votive Offerings from Bodh Gayā" in the *EASAA 2012 Conference Proceedings* (forthcoming 2013).

²⁸ Beglar took over 400 photographs overall for the ASI from 1870-1885. Ray Desmond. *The India Museum, 1801-1879* (London: H.M.S.O., 1982), p. 118.

²⁹ Desmond, *India Museum*, p. 168.

³⁰ Ibid, all of chapter 13 is relevant.

that same year the Council for India had sent letters to the BM, the Committee of the Council on Education (representing the South Kensington Museum) and the Board of Works (for Kew Gardens); each institution was asked to put forward a representative who would assist in the transfer of objects. The BM sent the Principal Librarian, the Keeper of Zoology and the Keeper of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography, A.W. Franks.³¹ In 1879 items in the collections were listed and the material dispersed. The lists were printed in book form and are now in the V&A; they are the basis for that Museum's Register. The general consensus was that the zoological, ethnological, and antiquities collections be sent to the BM, economic botany to Kew Gardens, geological specimens to the Museum of Practical Geology (now part of the Natural History Museum), and the remainder of the collection to the South Kensington Museum (soon to become V&A).³²

Franks was quick to list the objects he wanted from the IM. At the top of his list were the Amarāvātī sculptures; other desirable acquisitions included the gold relics discovered beneath a Burmese temple, the bronze and stone figures illustrating the Hindu pantheon, a quantity of arms and armour, ethnological specimens, Guthrie's jade collection and the Roman pavement excavated in Leadenhall Street.³³

Forbes Watson and Birdwood both expressed antipathy towards the South Kensington Museum, and therefore supported the plan that the majority of the collections from the IM be transferred to and administered by the BM. In fact, the BM had vacated a space in its Bloomsbury site to put up an Oriental gallery where the IM's collections would be displayed. This meant that there was no need to send IM material to South Kensington, as previously agreed. Nevertheless, the South Kensington Museum was reluctant to let the entirety of the collections go to the BM.³⁴

The South Kensington Museum joined forces with the Science and Art Department to make a case and approach the Treasury. The Treasury was told the following [in 1879]:³⁵

The Indian collections were the culmination of years of effort and expense with the laudable aim of stimulating an interest and demand from manufacturers for the raw and industrial produce of India. The India Museum could be made a "living reality" to the mutual benefit of Britain and India by adding to it the

³¹ Willis, "Sculpture from India" p. 257.

³² Desmond, *India Museum*, p. 168.

³³ Ibid, p. 171.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 175-7.

³⁵ Desmond, *India Museum*, p. 177.

applied art objects purchased from Imperial funds, now exhibited in the South Kensington Museum.

Thus there would be formed one collection of the Manufacturers and Art Industries of India, which would go far to establish such a beneficial interest... and the anomalous position of two Indian collections being formed within a few yards of each other under the management of two separate Government institutions would be prevented. ‘

It was in fact more economical to send the India Museum collections to the South Kensington Museum, also considered to have better facilities. This also meant the transferred collections would remain as one and not be dispersed throughout numerous institutions. All these facts attracted the Treasury that proceeded to give preference to the South Kensington Museum, provided the Amarāvātī and other ancient sculptures went to the BM to make up deficiencies in their archaeological collections. On the 11th of November 1879 the Council for India confirmed the Treasury’s decision and a telegram was sent to the Director of the South Kensington Museum that read: ‘Council to-day passed a resolution transferring India Museum to South Kensington’.³⁶ The transfer of the collections to Kew, the BM and the South Kensington Museum had to be completed by the 31st of December 1879.

A.W. Franks decided to display the Amarāvātī sculptures in the BM. He also ordered that 14 cases of fossils, 37 of Assyrian and Indian sculptures, the Leadenhall pavement, a mummy and one large shell be transferred to the BM’s storage from the India Office Stores.³⁷ The Library became the India Office Library, part of the Foreign and Common Office (F.C.O.). This later was incorporated into the BL. The BM handed over to the South Kensington Museum the facsimiles of the Ajaṇṭā Cave paintings and the South Kensington transferred the Masson collection of Afghanistan antiquities to the BM; the relationship between the institutions appears to have been amicable as material went back and forth between them for a few years while the collections were getting sorted.³⁸ In fact, once the dissolution of the IM was approved, the move of the collections went ahead quickly, with most of the material arriving within a year. Some objects continued to arrive as late as 1900.³⁹ The size of the transfer was so large that the collections still represent an on-going challenge. For example, the catalogue of the Masson collection of 9,698 items was only completed on the 1st of October 2013.

³⁶ Desmond, *India Museum*, p. 178.

³⁷ The Leadenhall Street Mosaic (BM OA.290).

³⁸ Desmond, *India Museum*, p. 180.

³⁹ Willis, “Sculpture from India”, p. 257.

In terms of material from BG, the BM received a few pieces from and related to the Mahābodhi from the IM. Among these were a mediaeval Pāla votive stūpa (BM 1880.4045) and a Burmese plaque from Bagan (BM 1880.4074) depicting BG.

The South Kensington Museum received and listed nearly 20,000 items from the transfer: models of trades, customs and transport; statues of Hindu and Buddhist divinities; clothes; rugs; furniture; sculptures; arms; and a number of large individual collections. They also received the materials from the former museum of the Royal Asiatic Society that were on loan to the IM.⁴⁰ The new collections required curatorial attention, therefore in January 1880 the South Kensington Museum appointed Caspar Purdon Clarke to advice on the arrangement of the Indian collections.⁴¹ He went on to become a pivotal figure in the history of the V&A and is credited with expanding and enriching the Indian collections significantly.

The V&A: Purdon Clarke and other important collections

Caspar Purdon Clarke. The V&A's South Asian collections have their origin in the IM as just noted. Purdon Clarke (1846-1911) was an architect who worked in Italy and Persia prior to his arrival in the South Kensington Museum's architectural office in 1867. He purchased objects for the Museum in the Middle East and designed the Indian section of the French International Exhibition in 1878.⁴²

In 1880 the newly opened India Museum in South Kensington attracted huge crowds (see Fig. 1.6).⁴³ However, the displays manifested gaps in the collections due to the nature of how they had been gathered by the East India Office and, subsequently, the India Museum. Birdwood described these deficiencies to the Committee of the Privy Council on Education in April 1880 that in turn decided to send Birdwood and Purdon Clarke to India to acquire more materials:⁴⁴

Although Birdwood had valued all the objects at around £250,000 they were considered unrepresentative of the art manufactures of the sub-continent and overloaded with "objects of mongrel Indo-European design". The India Museum was criticised as having been built up largely through donations and unwanted remainders from the various international exhibitions. It was never

⁴⁰ V&A Museum: list of lenders of objects transferred from the India Museum to South Kensington Museum 1 June 1880.

⁴¹ Desmond, *India Museum*, p. 190.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ M. Baker, B Richardson and A. Burton, *A Grand Design: the Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), p. 225.

⁴⁴ Desmond, *India Museum* p. 192.

systematically planned and developed and was especially deficient in carpets and pottery which the South Kensington Museum had to augment with loans from private collections. Its curatorship had been slack; the provenance of many objects, for example, was either unknown or doubtful. The Committee's remedy for all these alleged shortcomings was to suggest sending Purdon Clarke and Birdwood on a purchasing expedition to India; and they were prepared to allocate £2,000 for the purpose, hopeful that the India Office would donate a similar sum.

Birdwood decided not to go on the trip, claiming that he was in ill-health and that he was to look after the South Kensington Museum while Purdon Clarke was away. In the meantime, an itinerary was prepared, detailing the main places Purdon Clarke should visit, and he was given precise instructions. For instance, after a thorough examination of the collections, he was to go armed with Birdwood's handbook *Industrial Arts of India* and the inventory of the South Kensington Museum's objects; Purdon Clarke was also expected to submit monthly reports with sketches.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, these documents are currently un-located.

Caspar Purdon Clarke was in India between November 1881 and April 1882.⁴⁶ The first consignment of Purdon Clarke's 3,400 purchases in India arrived in September 1881 on the SS *Bretton Hall*. The acquisition included 286 pieces of jewellery within which were several distinctive types not previously represented, with some being the only examples known to come from a particular region.⁴⁷ Another important acquisition was a set of illustrations of the *Hamzanama* painted during the time of Akbar. Purdon Clarke also did much to cover the gaps in other aspects of the collection, for example, there was a notable lack of miniature painting (which had stayed with the India Office Library) and, with the transfer of the Amarāvati pieces to the BM, a lack of significant architectural sculpture.⁴⁸

It is therefore unsurprising, given the need for architectural sculpture and Purdon Clarke's training as an architect, that most of the material he acquired while at the Mahābodhi temple site was of an architectural nature. Purdon Clarke visited BG at the time that J. D. Beglar and Cunningham were carrying out the restoration works in the early 1880s. The pieces he bought, recorded in the V&A Registrars as being from excavations in the precincts of the temple at BG, arrived in London in 1883. The Purdon Clarke material comprises the

⁴⁵ N. Barnard, *Indian Jewellery: the V&A Collection* (London: V&A, 2008), pp. 108-11.

⁴⁶ Desmond, *India Museum*, p. 192.

⁴⁷ Barnard, *Indian Jewellery*, pp. 108-11.

⁴⁸ A. Somers Cocks, *The Victoria and Albert Museum – The Making of the Collection* (Leicester: Windward, 1980), p. 129.

majority of the collection from BG held in the V&A currently. Some are in display in the V&A galleries, while others are in storage in Blythe House and Dean Hill Park. There are approximately 30 pieces from BG. These include sculptures, stūpas, column bases, reliefs, a door frame and other architectural fragments.

Purdon Clarke was made the first Keeper of the Indian Section in July 1883 and subsequently became Director of the South Kensington Museum in 1896 (see Fig. 1.7). He later, in 1905, became director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, from which he finally retired.⁴⁹ Purdon Clarke was knighted for the success of his venture and the economy with which it was achieved.⁵⁰

Other Collections: William Masters and A.H. Giles. While the majority of the BG material in the V&A collections was from the IM and the Purdon Clarke acquisitions, other important pieces came from people such as William Masters and A.H. Giles in the first half of the 20th century. Between them they gathered approximately 15 sculptures from BG.

The pieces collected by William Masters were given to the Bethnal Green Museum by Emma Teresa Masters and then transferred to the V&A in 1917. A letter in the V&A Registry details how these items were collected in Bihar and shows a sketch of the main pieces. It is written by Col. A. Masters, on behalf of Emma Teresa Masters, and reads as follows:⁵¹

The late William Masters, Sub Deputy Opium Agent in the Bihar Agency, India, was for some years stationed at Gya where he procured some stone sculptures from the ancient ruins of the great temple of Buddha at Budh-Gya before the Government took over these archaeological ruins for preservation. Four of these stones which W. Masters brought home on retirement from India are now in London and W. Master's widow desires to present these stones to the Bethnal Green Museum should they be considered acceptable.

Further correspondence between the Bethnal Green Museum and Stanley Clarke in the V&A confirms the museum's desire to incorporate these pieces into the collection. Although wrongly dated to the 6th century CE, Stanley Clarke was quick to describe this acquisition as an important addition to their limited collection of architectural sculptures from BG.

Another important set of pieces came to the V&A soon after the Second World War. In 1950 Mrs Mary Charles sold Mr A. H. Giles' collection to the museum; two of the items in this

⁴⁹ Somers Cocks, *The Victoria and Albert Museum*, p. 129.

⁵⁰ Barnard, *Indian Jewellery*, pp. 108-11.

⁵¹ V&A Registered Paper 17/1843.

collection remained in the Bristol Museum. Mr Giles' brother was an important figure and he knew and collaborated with Alexander Cunningham in a number of projects. For instance, some Chinese translations published in *Mahābodhi* were provided by him. A. H. Giles wrote a letter, dated on the 24th of September 1924, in which he described the contents of his collection and provided accounts of Cunningham's time working on the excavations of the Mahābodhi temple:⁵²

The Buddhist images at Churchill Court were taken by me from the old temple of Bodh-Gaya and the ruins of another temple in the same district, viz Gaya (...), of which district I was District Supt. of Police for 7 years. In 1876 General Cunningham, head of the Archaeological Department was sent to repair the old temple originally built to commemorate Buddha's Meditation and foundation of a new faith. He died about B.C. 500. During excavations round the base many votive offerings were dug out –some from distant countries. The inscriptions on the older ones were mostly in the 'old Pāli' language which could only be read by experts. One was in Chinese which I got my brother (then in the China Consular Service and now professor of Chinese at Cambridge) to decipher –for which service General Cunningham got him elected an Associate Member of the Bengal Asiatic Society, and sent him one of the excavated offerings as a present. He also gave me a very nice medallion of Buddha, which I have here, authorised his Assistant to permit me to select two or three others, which are now at the Court. Two of those however were taken by me from the ruins of a small shrine at least 20 miles East of Bodh Gayā. (...) The inscription on every stone excavated was examined either by General Cunningham or his Assistant. Subsequently the General wrote a full account of his work and discoveries, and sent it home to be printed, but unfortunately it was lost (with a large collection of antiquities he had made during 30 years of service in India) in the wreck of the Hindostan. He has since published as much as he was able to from memory and notes. My brother has published translations of works written by the Chinese pilgrims who visited Bodh-Gaya in the 5th and 7th century respectively viz Fa Hsien and Thwen Sangle...

The A. H. Giles collection included approximately 13 pieces, among which were 2 Buddhas, 6 relief panels, 3 votive stūpas and other fragments.

⁵² See letter by A.H. Giles in the V&A Registrar.

Other significant items from BG in the V&A include the post-Aśokan Pillar and photographs of the Mahābodhi temple taken by Beglar for the ASI.⁵³ Some additional important pieces related to the site have been gifted or acquired by the V&A in recent years. For example, a stūpa was purchased in 2003.⁵⁴

The BL

The material from BG held in the BL has also been consulted for this thesis, but it has not been the focus of in-depth research. Nevertheless, the importance of the material in the BL is undeniable. The collections include sketches, paintings, photographs and other documents depicting BG.

The BL used to be part of the BM and both institutions shared the Bloomsbury site until the 1990s. When the IM dissolved, the India Office Library was transferred to the Foreign Office which then moved it to a facility in Waterloo. Eventually the India Office merged with the BL and moved to the new site.

The Archaeological Survey of India Collections (ASI) are among the most important in the BL. These include many photographic prints showing the Mahābodhi temple, its excavation and restoration, and the sculptures found. Some were taken by Henry Baily Wade Garrick in the early 1880s and others by J.D. Beglar in the 1860s and 1870s. Other important photographs showing BG are held in the Elgin Collection and were taken in 1880 by Bourne and Shepherd.

The BL also holds some drawings and sketches of the site at BG. The earliest is a pencil drawing by Thomas Daniell (1749-1840) that shows the state of the Mahābodhi in 1790. Other important examples are in the album of Markham Kittoe (1808-1853). This contains 44 folios with drawings of the railing. Other items in the BL collections include a pen and ink drawing by Sir Charles D'Oyly that dates to 1824; a watercolour of the temple from 1880 by James Cockatt; and 2 items, an anonymous watercolour (most likely painted between 1789-1820) and a pen and ink drawing showing the temple and Bodhi Tree (1800), both in the MacKenzie Collection.

Conclusion

The stated aim of this thesis is to bring together the London collections of BG material held predominantly in the BM and V&A in order to critically review the site's history and re-contextualise it. Looking at a wider spectrum of pieces allows for a more comprehensive

⁵³ See Chapter 4.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 4.

understanding of the Mahābodhi's history. This chapter has begun this process by presenting a history of the main collections in the BM and V&A.

The focus has been on approximately 365 pieces kept in the collections in the London Museums. As has been shown, these collections started to be put together in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Due to the dispersal of the IM and hurried subsequent re-distribution of its materials, pieces from sites like BG have been separated and kept in different collections since. This project has, for the first time since they were separated, looked at them as one collection of material culture from BG. The BM's collection is more archaeological, the V&A's materials are more sculptural and architectural. The collections therefore complement each other, yielding examples of different types, all linked to the Mahābodhi. Their study does much to help start a critical reassessment of BG's art and architectural history.

The biography of the BG materials reflects the processes of collecting favoured in the late 19th century and the politics surrounding them. When gathering his collection, Cunningham was focused on collecting objects based on their typologies, rather than on the archaeology. This is confirmed by the lack of information on find spots. Purdon Clarke was focused on finding valuable items that would enrich the Oriental Collections in the V&A. In the 19th century, collectors grew in number and collecting was established. The nature of the BG materials in London reflects the time when the collections were first gathered.

Chapter 2 –Bodhi Tree

Bihār is the holy land of Buddhism, with the most sacred Buddhist sites located in the area. It was there that Buddha meditated, taught and -more importantly- attained Enlightenment. The Buddha reached *nirvāṇa* at BG, under a tree, the *ficus religiosa*, otherwise known as the bodhi tree. In this chapter, I will study the history of this sacred tree from the time of the Buddha to the 19th century when Cunningham and his team arrived at BG to excavate the site and restore the Mahābodhi temple.⁵⁵ I will carefully review the literature available on the bodhi tree's history, while also analysing the development of its worship. Worshipping of the bodhi tree led to the establishment of Buddhist pilgrimage to BG. Even though the bodhi tree is holy to both Buddhists and Hindus (who believe the tree was planted by Brahma), for purposes of this thesis I will be looking at its history from the Buddhist perspective.

Buddha and Enlightenment

The sanctity of the bodhi tree derives from the Buddha attaining Enlightenment under it, so we must therefore look at Śākyamuni's life to trace the origin of the worship of this tree. Although we do not know with accuracy when the historical Buddha lived, the time can be estimated to between 500 and 400 BCE. The historical Buddha, also known as Siddhārtha Gautama, was born into an aristocratic family that lived near Lumbini (in present day Nepal). Near the time of his birth, a prophecy was made stating that Siddhārtha Gautama would either go on to become a powerful monarch or a great religious teacher. His father wanted his son to continue presiding over the family land after his death and therefore raised the Buddha in a life of luxury. His family believed this would prevent him from pursuing a life as a monk. However, in early adulthood, the Buddha went on four journeys from the palace and the sights he encountered on the excursions changed his path in life. In his first excursion he saw a helpless elderly man; in his second he saw an ill man; during his third he witnessed a grieving family taking a corpse to cremation; and on the fourth he saw a mendicant who led a religious life.⁵⁶ These visions made Buddha reflect about old age, illness, death and suffering. The Buddha then made the decision to abandon his family, lifestyle and privileges to become a wandering ascetic. He proceeded to meditate, fast, and practice austerities. Concluding

⁵⁵ The Sacred Fig or *ficus religiosa* is a species of tree native to India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, China and parts of South East Asia. It is also known as Bo-Tree (from Sanskrit 'bodhi' meaning 'wisdom' or 'enlightened') and Peepal (in India). It is a large dry season semi-evergreen tree that can grow up to 30m (98 ft.) tall and with a trunk diameter of up to 3m (9.8 ft.). The leaves are cordate in shape with a distinctively extended tip. The fruit is a small fig. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/bo-tree>

⁵⁶ Hendrik Kern, *Manual of Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1898), pp. 15-18.

eventually that extremes were not helpful he decided on moderation or the 'Middle Way' as the path to liberation and freedom. The Buddha is said to have been in his mid-30s when he reached BG and sat under the tree. There, after a long period of meditation, he attained Enlightenment. After attaining *nirvāṇa* at BG, Buddha left the bodhi tree and never revisited the site. Buddhist texts mention various occasions during which he recounted his experience at BG, after which he proceeded to Sarnāth, where he taught the *dharma* at the 'deer park'. After a career as a teacher, he is said to have passed away at an old age at Kushinagar. According to the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and the *Aśokāvadāna*, it was there that he encouraged his followers to visit the four memorable Buddhist places: Lumbini, Sarnāth, Bodh Gayā and Kushinagar. This initiated Buddhist pilgrimage to the key sites of the Buddha's life. Buddha said the following:⁵⁷

By reason of the fact, Ananda, 'Here did the Tathagata intuit the unsurpassed intuition of true enlightenment', the place of the Tathagata's enlightenment is worth seeing by a man of faith for inspiration.

History of the Bodhi tree and the Establishment of Pilgrimage

With the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* being of an uncertain date, the first secure understanding of BG comes from the Aśokan slab, now known as the Diamond Throne, placed beside the bodhi tree in the 3rd BCE.⁵⁸ According to the available literature, the origins of BG as a pilgrimage site can be traced back to Aśoka, who was said to be among the first to worship the tree.⁵⁹

The first depictions of the shrine at BG are the bas reliefs of Bharhut and the carvings from Sāñchī (see Figs. 2.1-2.3). They date to circa 150 BCE and 50 BCE respectively. They show iconographic representations of the bodhi tree rising in an open-air tree and next to an altar, presumably the Aśokan slab.⁶⁰ The iconography evolves stylistically but remains otherwise

⁵⁷ This is in *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and could be read as a text advocating pilgrimage to these places. The date of this passage is debated and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into a detailed analysis of the problems. For the present purpose I need only note that the Pāli version appears in *Digha Nikāya* and this had a commentary written on it by Buddhaghosa in the 4th century CE. The compilation of the canon itself is attributed by tradition to the 1st century CE. This quote given here is taken from the *Aśokāvadāna*. Benimadhab Barua, "Gaya and Buddha Gaya", in *Early History of the Holy Land* (Calcutta: Indian Research Institute Publications, 1934), p. 167.

⁵⁸ Harry Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philip von Zabern, 2006), pp. 284-6.

⁵⁹ John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: a Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1989).

⁶⁰ Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *Early Indian Architecture* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975).

constant until circa the 4th century when the Kumrahar plaque shows a temple built in front of the tree. This is taken up in Chapter 3.

Early History. Evidence so far suggests that the establishment of pilgrimage linked to the bodhi tree did not start until Aśoka visited BG and recorded his visit on the Eighth Major Rock Edict.⁶¹

(I) In the ages gone by, [kings styled] 'Beloved of the Gods' used [only] to go out on tours of pleasure. (II) During such [tours], hunting and other pastimes of the kind used to be [enjoyed by them]. (III) Now, king Priyadarśin Beloved of the Gods, went to Sambodhi ten years after his coronation. (IV) Thence started these pilgrimages for Dharma. (V) During these (pilgrimages), the following take place, [viz.] visiting the Śramaṇas and Brāhmaṇas and making gifts [to them], meeting the aged and making provision of money [for them], and contacting the people of the countryside, instructing [them] in Dharma and discussing [with them] the principles of Dharma, this being conducive to the [above, i.e. their initiation into Dharma]. (VII) This is the supreme delight of king Priyadarśin, Beloved of the Gods. (VII) [All his] other [pleasures] are inferior [to this].

It is important to note that there have been differing interpretations of the word *sambodhi* as it appears in the edict.⁶² Hultzsch leaves the interpretation ambiguous stating that the Buddha went to Enlightenment rather than to BG.⁶³ This is followed by Nikam.⁶⁴ Other interpretations, such as Sircar's *Aśokan Studies*, have been more literal and favour the theory that Aśoka physically went to BG.⁶⁵ Although there are questions surrounding the edict, the literal interpretation that confirms Aśoka's links to BG has prevailed. By the time the *Aśokāvadāna* is written in the first centuries CE a legend about the cutting and regeneration of the tree was well-established. The Chinese pilgrim Faxian (337 – 422 CE), who went to BG around 400 CE, was familiar with this story, especially as a means to explain the high platform erected surrounding the bodhi tree. Most likely he learnt this through the *Aśokāvadāna* that was already available during his time and first translated into Chinese in circa 300 CE. On the contrary, the *Mahāvamsa* states that the tree was killed at BG and the only surviving

⁶¹ D. C. Sircar, *Aśokan Studies* (Calcutta: Indian Museum, 2000), p. 28 with modifications.

⁶² The word *sambodhi* only appears in Aśoka's VIIIth Rock Edict.

⁶³ E. Hultzsch, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Vol 1: Inscriptions of Aśoka* (Oxford: Printed for the Government of India at the Clarendon Press, 1925), pp. 59-60.

⁶⁴ N.A. Nikam and R. McKeon, *The Edicts of Aśoka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 37.

⁶⁵ Sircar, *Aśokan Studies*, pp.27-8.

descendant was that transported to Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. This text was redacted with a political agenda that highlighted the supremacy of Sri Lanka and of the Theriya order within the island. This is a separate narrative that did not enjoy currency in North India.

The *Aśokāvadāna* claimed that Aśoka initially did not believe in Buddhism and thus ordered the cutting of the Pipal tree. When he later converted, the sacred bodhi tree was restored. Then his devotion for it grew so strong that it rendered his queen jealous and she in turn ordered the cutting of the holy tree. Aśoka threw himself on the floor in despair and in a bid to resuscitate the tree, ordered the erection of a platform. From it he bathed the roots with milk and the tree once again grew.⁶⁶ The only fact that can be deduced from this story, told time and time again, is that the bodhi tree was at BG when Faxian went and a platform, attributed to Aśoka, was built surrounding it.

These tales went on to be widely accepted as historical facts and referred to as such by scholars of the 19th century, although they are more of an attempt at an explanation of the development of the platform and the enclosure of the tree than anything else. For instance, L.S.S. O'Malley published a detailed account of the legends surrounding Aśoka and the bodhi tree in 1906 for the *Bengal District Gazetteer*:⁶⁷

It was first cut down by Aśoka in his unregenerate days, but after he became a believer in the law of Buddha he lavished an inordinate devotion upon it. His queen, jealous of this attachment and grudging the jewels which Aśoka offered to the tree, again had it cut down, but for a second time it was miraculously restored to life. The intense veneration in which the tree was held even at this early date is shown by the gorgeous ceremonies that took place when a branch was taken to Sri Lanka in the reign of Aśoka. From the Buddhist Chronicles we learn that the whole way from Patna to Bodh Gaya was cleared and decorated, and that a splendid urn of solid gold was made for the reception of the sacred shoot. The Emperor himself, attended by a long train of elephants, chariots, horse and foot, escorted the urn to the tree, which its votaries had enriched with all manner of gifts. Gems sparkled from among its leaves, rows of flags and streamers waved from its branches, and it was laden with fragrant blossoms, the

⁶⁶ Strong, *Aśokāvadāna*, pp. 125-130, 257-8.

⁶⁷ L. S. S. O'Malley, "Buddha and Bodh Gaya" in *The Bengal District Gazetteer* (Bengal: Darbar Press for the Bihār and Orissa Govt. Press, 1905), p. 53.

*offerings of devotees. After elaborate ceremonies, a branch was looped off, placed in the urn, and then escorted with much pomp to the coast. A bas-relief of the eastern gateway at Sāñchī portrays the scene (see Fig.05). In the middle is seen the bodhi tree with Aśoka's temple rising half-way up it. A procession with musicians is carved on both sides, and to the right of a royal person, perhaps Aśoka, is dismounting from his horse with the help of a dwarf. Above is another sculpture which shows a small bodhi tree in a pot and a long procession on its way to a towered city.*⁶⁸

Sri Lanka's links to BG began at an early period according to the *Mahāvamsa*, when an offshoot of the bodhi tree was then planted in Anuradhapura in 288 BCE, during the 12th year of Asoka's reign. The tree, or its descendants on this site, are still alive and under active worship. The links between BG and Sri Lanka remained strong during centuries to come. Subsequently, in the 4th century, in the reign of Samudra Gupta, a monastery was built by the Sri Lankan Buddhist king in the precincts of the Mahābodhi, after two monks had been to the site to pay their respects. Also during the Gupta times, BG welcomed a number of Chinese pilgrims. As already mentioned, Faxian visited the site and the main Buddhist sites in China, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, and briefly noted the appearance of BG. There were three monasteries and numerous monks, but Faxian does not mention the tree.⁶⁹

By circa 600 CE, a new tale of destruction and miraculous rebirth of the tree arises. Śaśanka, the king of I Bengal, was a Śiva worshipper and is claimed by Xuanzang to have strongly opposed Buddhism.⁷⁰ He ordered the bodhi tree to be dug up and burnt. The tree was later replanted by Pūrṇavarman, the Buddhist king of Magadha, who claimed the bodhi tree had a miraculous resuscitation, growing approximately 10 feet in a single night.⁷¹ Pūrṇavarman also erected a wall around the bodhi tree to protect it from being cut or harmed again in the future.⁷² This story replicates that of Aśoka's queen killing the tree and him bringing it back to life. It too mentions the king lying on the floor in despair, then bathing the bodhi tree with milk, and the erection of an enclosure around it. Therefore, the legendary tale is repeated as a narrative with only the characters altered. The story was likely being re-told to pilgrims by monks at BG, but no epigraphic or archaeological evidence of the incident involving Śaśanka

⁶⁸ See Appendix for more details on Asoka's legend involving the cutting of the bodhi tree.

⁶⁹ Foe Koue Ki, *The Pilgrimage of Fa-hian* (India: Cosmo Publications, 2000), p. 325

⁷⁰ S. Narayan, "Tree Cult in India" in *Bodh Gaya: Śiva – Buddha* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1987), p. 78

⁷¹ O'Malley, "Buddha and Bodh Gaya", p. 53.

⁷² Narayan, "Tree Cult in India", p. 78

and Pūrṇavarman is available. We do know of Śaśanka through coinage. We also know the enclosure around the bodhi tree was extended around his time, a subject taken up in Ch 3.

By the time that the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (602 – 664 CE), visited BG in the first half of the 7th century CE, the tree was, according to him, quite young.⁷³ Xuanzang arrived with other monks and pilgrims to worship the sacred tree and the Diamond Throne, to which he refers to as *vajrāsana* for the first time.⁷⁴ Xuanzang provided the following description:⁷⁵

..a journey of 14-15 li south-west from the Pragbodhi Hill brought one to the bodhi tree. The enclosing walls...are built of brick, high and strong; the enclosure is long from east to west, and narrow from north to south... The principal gate opens east (...), the south gate is connected with a large flower-tank, the west limit is a natural defence, and the north gate communicates with the grounds inside the walls of a large monastery.

In addition to Xuanzang, more than 56 names of monks and pilgrims traveling to India are known.⁷⁶ For example and most notably, Yijing (635 – 713 CE), a monk from Tang China and a disciple of Amoghavajra, who followed in the footsteps of Faxian and Xuanzang by going for study at Nālandā.

Yijing's texts provide crucial information about pilgrimage during his time.⁷⁷ Although Faxian mentions pilgrims at BG, Yijing is the first to describe the worship of the tree. Due to his interest in rituals, we also learn that pilgrims were coming from China as well as from Korea and South East Asia. The travel routes being taken by these people are also mentioned by Yijing. There were two ways to reach the sacred Buddhist sites: the sea route and the land route. The sea route would see pilgrims going by the islands of South East Asia and Sri Lanka, while the land route would take pilgrims through the Tibetan plateau or along the Silk Roads. Although some pilgrims perished on the way, many successfully reached important centres like Nālandā and paid their respects to the bodhi tree and the Vajrāsana. By this time, pilgrimage centred on the sites in Bihār was well-established.

Medieval History. Temples and statues continued to be built and consecrated at BG during

⁷³ S.H. Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996) p.106. See also O'Malley, "Buddha and Bodh Gaya", p. 47.

⁷⁴ Kern, *Manual of Indian Buddhism*, p. 97

⁷⁵ Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*, p. 106.

⁷⁶ Samuel Beal, "Two Chinese-Buddhist Inscriptions Found at Buddha Gaya" in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Volume 13. No.4 (Cambridge University Press, 1881), p. 556.

⁷⁷ Yijing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998), p. 108.

the time of the Pāla kings (8th-12th centuries CE). During this time, Chinese pilgrims continued to come to India to visit the sacred tree. On many occasions, they offered sculptures and left inscriptions or memorials of their visits to the site of the Mahābodhi. Some examples of these are two Chinese-Buddhist inscriptions found around the main temple at BG during the latter restoration works.⁷⁸ In 1881, Beal published an article in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* where he provided information on many of these Chinese pilgrims who visited the bodhi tree during the Pāla times. One of the inscription dates to 1022 CE (Song dynasty) and narrates the visit of a priest, Ilo-Yun:⁷⁹

Ilo-Yun went to Buddha Gaya with a view to worship the sacred relics of the place. While there, he carved a stone pagoda, with a surmounting pinnacle and a square base, thirty paces to the north of the bodhi tree, in honour of the thousand Buddhas.

In addition to the Chinese pilgrims during the Pāla times, followers from elsewhere also reached BG. Burmese missions were sent by the king of Burma from the 11th century. In addition to visiting the site, the Burmese played a role in the preservation of the Mahābodhi temple and the bodhi tree. They restored the temple, which had fallen to disrepair, between 1079 and 1086 CE.⁸⁰ Later work is also recorded.⁸¹

The practice of Indian Buddhism seems to have changed during the 12th century. Some scholars claim that the religion suffered a severe decline, but this has been discounted by A. Amar.⁸² While the reasons for the decline of Buddhism remain unclear, the fact is that there was a decline in the production and offering of inscriptions and votive deposits at BG during this century. Buddhism in Bihār was further affected towards the beginning of 13th century, a situation also faced by Hinduism.

Late Medieval History: Islamic Supremacy and Hindu Presence. The Delhi Sultanate expanded significantly during the 13th century CE. BG is not mentioned in Islamic records, but there is no reason to doubt that the site was affected, especially since other Buddhist sites in Bihār, like Nālandā, were sacked.⁸³ Beal and other writers following him speak of the destruction of

⁷⁸ These are widely discussed in Beal's "Two Chinese-Buddhist Inscriptions found at Buddha Gaya" and in Gonkatsang and Willis "Tibetan, Burmese and Chinese Inscriptions from Bodhgayā in the British Museum".

⁷⁹ Beal, "Two Chinese-Buddhist Inscriptions found at Buddha Gaya", p. 555.

⁸⁰ Alexander Cunningham, *Mahābodhi; or the Great Buddhist Temple Under the Bodhi Tree at Buddha-Gaya* (London: W.H. Allen, 1892).

⁸¹ Gonkatsang and Willis, "Tibetan, Burmese and Chinese Inscriptions from Bodhgayā in the British Museum".

⁸² Abhishek S. Amar, "Bodh Gaya and Gaya: Buddhist Responses to Brahmana Challenges in Early Medieval India" in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (2012), pp. 155-85.

⁸³ Barua, *Buddha and Buddha Gaya*, p. 203.

the Buddhist sites. However Dharmasvāmin, a Tibetan traveller, found some of Nālandā functioning in 1234.⁸⁴ Concurrently, the Burmese were carrying out extensive repairs to the Mahābodhi in the 1230s. The date and mention of Buddhasena show that local kings were operating as subordinates under Itutmish and his subordinates in the provinces.⁸⁵ We cannot therefore assume that BG was sacked. Pilgrims continued to visit the holy tree during the 1300s. They left records of their visits during this time, even though they were not allowed to build more temples or consecrate stupas like their predecessors had.⁸⁶ According to Cunningham's theories it was also during this time that the holy tree and the Mahābodhi temple were appropriated by the Hindus. The Hindu Mahants were given control of the Mahābodhi and the bodhi tree in the Mughal period and retained it till the mid-20th century.⁸⁷

It is important to note that Hinduism was not a new phenomenon in Bihār and that this region had never been exclusively Buddhist. The Hindu presence near BG can be traced back to the 1st century CE, when Gaya, a town just 10 kilometres north of the site of the Mahābodhi, first emerged as a centre of the *Vaiṣṇava* faith. Between the 5th and 12th centuries, both *Vaiṣṇavas* and *Śaivas* established themselves in the BG region, and their importance grew rapidly with Gaya becoming a Hindu pilgrimage site itself.⁸⁸ An indicator of Hinduism's growing presence were the numerous temples to *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva* that were built both in Gaya and in the entire region.⁸⁹ *Śaivism* is known to the BG region from the Gupta period. These developments in the geographical milieu of BG, and the growth Brahmanism which they represented, posed serious challenges to the long-established Buddhist community in the region, well before the arrival of Islam.

Hindus also had their own legendary tales surrounding the bodhi tree. Considering that Buddha is part of the Hindu cosmology (he is considered an avatar of *Viṣṇu*) and the Hindu views on the bodhi tree (it possesses links to *Viṣṇu* and *Brahma*), it should not come as a

⁸⁴ Harmut Scharfe, *Handbook of Oriental Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p. 150.

⁸⁵ George Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvāmin* (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959). See also Michael Willis, Pukhraj Maroo and Om Prakash Misra, "The History of Central India and the Chambal Valley: Regional and Pan-Indian Perspectives" in *The Chambal Valley* (Delhi: Bookwell, 2010), pp. 17-24.

⁸⁶ Barua, *Buddha and Buddha Gaya*, p. 210.

⁸⁷ Beal, "Two Chinese-Buddhist Inscriptions found at Buddha Gaya".

⁸⁸ Amar, "Bodh Gaya and Gaya: Buddhist Responses to Brahma Challenges in Early Medieval India", pp. 555-6.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Images of both *Sūrya* and *Viṣṇu* dating to the Gupta and Post-Gupta periods at Gayā can be seen in the V&A Museum collections.

surprise that with the decline of Buddhism, the Mahābodhi was taken over. The Gaya Mahātmya provided the following account on the bodhi tree:⁹⁰

After bowing to dharma and Dharmesvara, he (the Pilgrim) should bow to the Mahābodhi tree (Mahābodhitaru), (with this mantra), “reverence to the Tree whose leaves tremble, where Viṣṇu stands Eternally, to the truth of awakening (bodhitattvaya), To sacrifice, and to the Asvattha tree. You are the Eleventh of eleven, and also the eighth of eight; you Are the Narayana of the gods, you are the Pipala, the King of trees. Since Narayana stands in you for all Time, Asvattha king of trees, you are perpetually Auspicious among trees; you are fortunate; you are the Destroyer of bad dreams. I believe Hari, the divine wielder of the conch, discus and mace, in the form of Asvattha, the Lotus Eyed, having the shape of a branch (sakharupadhara).

From the late medieval period at BG, little material is available. All evidence seems to point to the fact that the temple remained as a fairly active Hindu shrine, with some Hindu images scattered around the site, and rarely receiving visits by Buddhist pilgrims (see Fig. 2.4). By the 18th and 19th centuries CE, the Mahābodhi temple and the bodhi tree were both in a state of decay.

Modern History: 19th century CE. In the early 19th century, with the arrival of the British and photography, we first see pictures of the bodhi tree at BG. We can deduce from a drawing held in the BL’s Mackenzie Collection that the tree was alive in the early days of the century, standing on a circular platform behind the Mahābodhi (see Fig. 2.5). Shortly after the anonymous artist produced this sketch of the site (1809-1812), Buchanan-Hamilton visited BG and wrote about the state of the temple and the tree. In *The Districts of Bihār and Patna in 1811-12* printed in the 1830s, Buchanan-Hamilton provides the following description of the bodhi tree and its terrace:⁹¹

The terrace enlarges behind the temple towards the west, and forms an area, on which is growing the Pipal tree, which the orthodox suppose to have been planted by Brahma. The worshippers of Gautama on the contrary assert, that it is placed exactly in the centre of this earth, and call it Bodhidruma. They say that it was planted by Dugdha Kamini, King of Singhaldwip, 2225 years before the

⁹⁰ Amar, “Bodh Gaya and Gaya”, p. 22-23.

⁹¹ Buchanan-Hamilton, *The Districts of Bihār and Patna in 1811-12*, pp. 154-5.

year of our Lord, 1811, that is according to them 125 years before the building of the temple. The tree is in full vigour, and cannot in all probability exceed 100 years in age; but a similar one may have existed in the same place, when the temple was entire. Around its root has been lately raised a circular elevation of brick and mortar in various concentric stages, and on one of these has been placed a confused multitude of images, and carved fragments of stone, taken from the ruins.

In the decades following Buchanan-Hamilton's visit, scholarly interest in BG grew. With the British studying and publishing on the site, more photographs were taken documenting the state of the temple and the tree. Some of this early research is described by Mitra, who said Mr. Hawthorpe forwarded to James Prinsep copies of some BG inscription so they would be read. These were later published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Soon after, it was Kittoe who focused his attention on the district of Gaya after being appointed as Archaeological Surveyor of the Government of India in 1846. In Gaya and BG he collected drawings, inscriptions and sculptures.⁹²

Cunningham, who eventually led the excavation and restoration works at the site of the Mahābodhi temple, visited BG on a number of occasions, the first being in 1861. In December 1862, Cunningham published the following description of the state of the bodhi tree:⁹³

(This tree was) very much decayed; one large stem to the westward, with three branches, was still green, but the other branches were barkless and rotten.

This picture taken by Beglar illustrates the state of the bodhi tree (see Fig. 2.6). It demonstrates that, although the tree branches were not properly supported, with their weight causing the tree to tilt over the edge of the platform, the bodhi tree was alive. In fact this image proves that some of the tree branches were damaged, but overall it had a fair amount of foliage and healthy branches. This changed drastically in the years to follow. Another unpublished picture from the Cunningham collection in the BM that dates to the 1870s shows the tree as it stood in the early 1870s (see Fig. 2.7).⁹⁴

⁹² R. Mitra, *Buddha Gaya: the Great Buddhist Temple, the Hermitage of Sakya Muni* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972) p.iv.

⁹³ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p.30.

⁹⁴ However, much to the contrary of the pictures discussed above -and more importantly- published of the tree, where generally only a fraction of the tree is seen or we see the bodhi at an angle, here the majority of the tree is visible. Whether Cunningham and Mitra were using photography as a tool to represent a decaying tree, or whether it was in fact struck

The decade before the restoration works commenced in the early 1880s was a crucial one for the sacred tree. At the beginning of the decade (1870-71), Beglar and Cunningham said the tree was alive but decaying; by 1875 the tree was dying. Cunningham then claimed that the only remaining portion of the tree fell over the west wall of the Mahābodhi during a storm in 1876. The bodhi tree was therefore gone.⁹⁵

Many seeds of the tree had been collected and scions of the parent tree were growing and ready to take the place of the dead bodhi tree. This practice was the norm when dealing with perpetuating the presence of the bodhi tree: a young tree would be planted in the dead or dying tree's trunk. Mitra states the following about this process in his *Buddha Gaya*:⁹⁶

*But the tree passed through many vicissitudes; it was cut down at least thrice, and renewed several times; and as the plan of renewing the tree was evidently not by cutting down the old one and planting a new one in its place, but by dropping a seedling into an axilla or into a decayed spot of the old tree, so as to lead to the supposition that it was only a new shoot of the parent stem and not a stranger brought from a distance, it was found necessary to cover up the stem of the old one, to prevent the imposition from being discovered, and the rise of the platform was quite irregular.*⁹⁷

Neither Cunningham nor Mitra provide any more information on the bodhi tree; there is no mention of its removal - a fact worth highlighting considering their aim was to carefully document what they saw and did at BG-. When we see pictures of the early phases of the restoration work the tree was no longer visible on the platform of the temple where it had stood. It either fell over or was removed sometime after 1876, the year when the tree is said to have died. Following the completion of the restoration works, the first time we see the tree in its current location - on the ground and not up on the temple platform - is in an image from 1890.⁹⁸ It shows a young bodhi tree next to the *vajrāsana*.

Conclusion: Buddhist Traditions and Colonial Plans

Separating history from legend is difficult when it comes to matters related to the bodhi tree. Buddhist literature claims the tree has been in existence since the Buddha sat under it and attained Enlightenment at BG, where it will remain for the future Buddhas to do the same.

down during a storm, we do not know. What we learn from this BM picture is that the tree was not unwell in the 1870s, as Mitra, Beglar and Cunningham implied.

⁹⁵ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 30

⁹⁶ Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, p.94

⁹⁷ Architectural aspects of the bodhi tree's platform are discussed in Chapter 3.

⁹⁸ This is further discussed later in this Chapter.

However, from a factual standpoint, a tree cannot live for countless centuries. Cunningham reinforces this in *Mahābodhi*.⁹⁹

Through careful reading of the available literature on the bodhi tree's history, a series of facts that shed light into its fate can be uncovered. When Cunningham and his team commenced the works at BG, they first excavated the back of the temple, specifically the addition on top of which the tree stood. Buried under this extension of the temple was found the *vajrāsana*. The bodhi tree was originally on the ground, but by the medieval ages it was levelled with the Mahābodhi terrace (30 feet above where it first stood). The British saw it there in the 19th century.

The difference in elevation was the result of the process used to perpetuate the presence of the tree, with new shoots planted on the dying trunk. This practice, the accumulative nature of South Asian shrines, and the fact that the dead trunk had to be covered, would explain why the platform rose. This platform, composed of circular levels erected in a pyramidal structure, is seen in detail the materials in the BL collection and in the photographs in the Cunningham collection.

Using similar wording, Cunningham and Mitra publish in their respective books that the tree died, after falling during a storm. They give this as the explanation for the absence of the tree in the early 1880s. The bodhi tree is not a subject touched on deeply by either author due to the delicate nature of the matter: the tree is holy to Buddhists and Hindus. For instance, at that time the Burmese were actively trying to restore the Mahābodhi in order to resume pilgrimage to BG. It was due to their presence that Cunningham and his team were sent to the site with strict orders of taking over the works. In what appears to be a political move during the Anglo-Burmese wars, and bearing in mind that the Burmese king was funding the workers in charge of the intervention, it was the British team sent by the Government who eventually took control of the site and proceeded to restore and excavate it. In order to carry out the works, and with the aim of finding the Diamond Throne, the back addition of the temple where the bodhi tree sat had to be completely taken out. The tree therefore needed to be removed.

Cunningham and Mitra also published a number of images of the tree, including those by Beglar, all taken from an angle that makes the bodhi tree appear small and unwell (see Fig. 2.8). When looking closely at an unpublished picture in the BM that shows the opposite angle, it is clear that indeed the tree was leaning over the platform, but only a few of its branches were unwell (see Fig. 2.9). This renders the hypothesis that it fell over and died believable,

⁹⁹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p.31.

but discounts Mitra's and Cunningham's claims of a decaying tree. There are no photographs that illustrate a fallen or dead tree. Mitra states the following:¹⁰⁰

In 1876 the tree was dead and knocked down by a storm, and its place has now been filled by a seedling about three feet high.

This would indicate that the tree, which was seen decaying in 1861 and 1863, and said to have died in 1876, was replanted soon after with a young one (this must be before 1878, when Mitra published his book). Then the small tree, of which we have no photographic evidence, was removed in order to carry out the excavations and later replanted upon their completion. Planting a sapling and placing it in what was identified as its original location was an attempt at giving continuation to the Buddhist tradition. Cunningham mentions that upon the removal of the back addition of the Mahābodhi he encountered remnants of older trees as he dug down (see Fig. 2.10). These old roots indicated what Cunningham believed to be the original spot of the tree and thus he planted the young bodhi on the ground:¹⁰¹

Afterwards in 1880, when I saw the Vajrasan Throne uncovered outside the back wall of the Temple, it struck me that possibly some trace of the old bodhi trees might still be found where the original tree must have stood. I, therefore, had the ground dug up at a short distance to the west of the Vajrasan Throne. In the sandy soil, just outside the granite facing of the Throne, 3 feet below the level of the foot of the Throne, and 30 feet below the terrace level where the modern Tree had stood, I found two large pieces of an Old Pipal Tree, one 6 ½ inches in length, and the other 4 inches. As the whole mass of the great buttress at the back of the Temple, 32 feet long and 30 feet high by 14 feet thick, had been standing over this spot for more than 12 centuries, it seems not improbable that these two fragments may be part of the Pipal Tree which was cut down by Sasangka about A.D. 600 to 620.

Cunningham, when mentioning the replacement of the tree, is ambiguous. He is careful not to say when the scion was in fact planted, and it is my belief that the current tree was not put in place until the mid-1880s (see Fig. 2.11). There is no reason to doubt that that scion planted was an offshoot of the bodhi tree. The first picture of the modern bodhi tree dates to the early 1890s and shows a young tree. In the image, Anagarika Dharmapāla pays his respects to the *vajrāsana* and the tree (see Fig. 2.12). The bodhi tree continues to be under worship, welcoming visits from Buddhist pilgrims.

¹⁰⁰ Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, p. 99.

¹⁰¹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p.31

Chapter 3 –Mahābodhi Temple: Architectural History, Excavations and Restoration

As noted in earlier chapters, the Mahābodhi temple complex is located in BG, a town in the Indian state of Bihār. The temple proper, erected near the banks of the Phalgu river, possesses a long and rich history spanning many centuries. From Aśokan times to the present, a shrine or temple has stood on the spot where the Buddha attained Enlightenment. In this Chapter, I will discuss the architectural history of the Mahābodhi, from its early days as a simple shrine, through its development during the Gupta era, its decline and subsequent restorations, including that carried out by the British team lead by Cunningham in the final decades of the 19th century. A general introduction to Indian temple architecture will be provided, as well as a discussion on how the name Mahābodhi, by which we know the temple at BG, came to be.

The Mahābodhi temple is important for the history of Indian art because it is one of the oldest and most complete existing examples of brick architecture.¹⁰² Its history is written in its alterations, additions, excavations and other interventions. Following the nature of South Asian shrines, where new structures can be erected over existing ones, the Mahābodhi's architectural history is a layered one. My goal is to list and discuss chronologically these layers as far as they can be recovered from the surviving evidence and documentation.

In addition, I will place special emphasis on the excavation and restoration works done by the British. This intervention will be illustrated through a visual timeline detailing the restoration of the Mahābodhi, done using mainly Alexander Cunningham's documents and photographs held in the BM. This timeline will provide an insight into the agenda, design strategies and overall approach followed by the team in charge of excavating and restoring the temple.

Notes on Indian Temple Architecture

It is essential to understand the basic types, elements and styles that make up the architectural landscape of Bihār in order to fully grasp the evolution of the design of the Mahābodhi. The form of the Mahābodhi has remained fairly constant from the 7th century CE to the present, but evolved considerably in the preceding centuries.

Early Shrines. Wood was the material favoured from the later centuries BCE to the time of the Guptas, although some uses of brick and stone, mainly for foundations, have been recorded. The earliest elaborate edifices in India were palaces and forts, and therefore not what we

¹⁰² Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. x.

would describe as having a religious use. However, a few shrines, like BG, constitute an important exception.

In the place where the Mahābodhi was eventually erected, a simple shrine probably stood during the reign of Aśoka. In their earlier forms, the shrines of the Indian subcontinent appear to have been hypaethral (open-air), evolving from an enclosure of a sacred tree, to a pillared gallery.¹⁰³ These shrines, like the first one likely erected in BG by Aśoka, were composed of few simple architectural elements. Buddhist literature refers to various types of embellishments prevailing in the early centuries BCE and in the Śaka-Kuṣāṇa period.¹⁰⁴ In most cases, the shrines had a central slab (with or without a religious symbol), a tree, a railing and a column. Certain shrines would have been housed inside a pillared pavilion, believed by scholars such as Cunningham to have had a rounded (or dolmenoid). Altar-platforms were often placed under trees. This combination of platform and tree occurs in BG, as shown by relief sculptures and the discovery of the stone slab now referred to as the *vajrāsana*.¹⁰⁵ Frequently, the shrines were enclosed by a railing, which demarcated the sacred area. Sometimes an umbrella, a regal emblem, was placed in the top of the tree or over the altar.¹⁰⁶

The crowning dome-like element of early Indian shrines appears in one rock-cut shrine in Andhra and in much later wooden temples with domes in Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁷ The conclusions –or speculations– on their actual appearance are based on the study of depictions of shrines found on coins and reliefs from Sāñchī, Mathurā, Amarāvātī and Bharhut, and although these are legitimate sources, they are not conclusive.¹⁰⁸ Shrines represented on early reliefs show the following varieties: (1) a platform, with or without some symbol; (2) a platform under an umbrella; (3) a platform under a tree; (4) a platform enclosed by a railing; (5) a platform within a pillared pavilion; and (6) permutations and combinations of the above.¹⁰⁹

In reference to the history of the Mahābodhi, it can be claimed that the first architectural type found in BG was a railing with an umbrella over the *vajrāsana* which was an ornamented

¹⁰³ J. C. Harle, “Early Rock-Cut Architecture” in *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 43.

¹⁰⁴ M. Meister, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture* (Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁶ Meister, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 43; He does not cite the Sri Lankan temples.

¹⁰⁸ P. Agrawala, “Early Traditions and Beginnings” in *Gupta Temple Architecture* (Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1968), p. 9.

¹⁰⁹ Meister, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*, p. 6.

platform or altar.¹¹⁰ The pavilion, when built, probably surrounded the bodhi tree, with the *vajrāsana* stone slab located at its centre.

Temple. The second architectural type found at BG was a temple. These structures, dating to the 4th-7th centuries BCE, set the base for the characteristic medieval Indian temples that occupied the site down to the 19th century. Since only sparse archaeological remnants survive of pre-Gupta shrines, the Gupta ones constitute the earliest evidence of monumental architecture. This is due to the fact that Gupta temples were constructed using non-perishable materials like brick and stone, rather than wood.¹¹¹ It was during the Gupta era also that the structural potentiality of dressed stone was first fully appreciated, and the basic elements of the Indian temple's plan, comprising a square *garbhagrha* for the deity and a *maṇḍapa* for sheltering the devotee, emerged. Pressure to give the temple an architectural form was prompted by profound religious and ritual developments.¹¹²

The standards of form and style reached during the Gupta period determined the subsequent course of art and architecture in most of India. In Meister's view, art under the Guptas attained rare poise and maturity and emerged as the conscious vehicle for the intellectual and spiritual urge of the Indian ethos.¹¹³

Buddhism continued to flourish under the Gupta kings, resulting in the creation of some of the best-known Indian sculptures, notably at Sarnath. Iconographic formulations became fixed and the earliest free-standing temples were erected to house these religious images.¹¹⁴ As just noted, temples emerged and were made to house these religious images. Decorating these structures also enriched art practices, since Gupta temples traditionally had a plain interior but an ornamented door and pillars.

The origins of the Gupta style can be traced: forms and motifs inherited from the earlier art of Mathurā and Gandhāra. Some architectural elements characteristic of Gupta temples were the T-shaped doorway, the jambs decorated with superimposed and receding panels containing figures, the laurel-wreath moulding, the acanthus scroll and the chequerboard pattern.¹¹⁵ The actual buildings consisted for the most part of a single cubical sanctum (*garbhagrha*) of dressed masonry with simple mouldings to be entered by intricately carved

¹¹⁰ Agrawala, *Gupta Temple Architecture*, p. 8.

¹¹¹ Herbert Härtel, *Excavations at Sonkh* (Berlin, Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1993).

¹¹² Michael Willis, *The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹¹³ Meister, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*, p. 22.

¹¹⁴ Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 87.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 89.

doorways (see Figs. 3.1-3.2).¹¹⁶ Cunningham was the first scholar to delineate these and other features of Gupta architecture.¹¹⁷

A Gupta-period structure was erected at BG some years prior to the visits of Chinese pilgrims to the sacred site in the 600s. This replaced the shrine dating back to the reign of Aśoka and its likely replacements. This Gupta temple at BG would have had the architectural characteristics just discussed. Its general appearance is documented by the Kumrahar plaque. A drawing based on that plaque is shown in Fig. 3.3. The temple would have been made of brick and had a tower or superstructure with straight edges. The curved tower developed later, from the 7th century. Horizontal courses of the niches and pilasters on the four sides of the tower, an upper chamber, and a pointed vault or dome over the sanctuaries were also probably part of the design of the first temple (see Fig. 3.4).¹¹⁸ According to Alexander Cunningham's interpretation, the early date of the style of the temple is indicated by what he describes as a *square truncated pyramid*, which constitutes the main tower.¹¹⁹ We would, of course, like to know the date of this early temple. Given that temples were developed to house cult images, as shown above, it is likely that the first Mahābodhi was made to house the oldest image from the site, i.e. the seated Buddha with an inscription of Trikamala, now in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. This is assigned to the late 4th century.¹²⁰ This date accords well with the depiction on the Kumrahar plaque.

Although numerous repairs, some very extensive, have been done to the Mahābodhi, its basic form remains almost unaltered since the Gupta era (late 7th century CE).

The name 'Mahābodhi'

Cunningham called the great temple at BG: the Mahābodhi. It was the common name by which people would refer to the temple in the late 19th century. In the earliest records, the simple form *bodhi* was used and that is how the tree is referred to in the Bharhut bas-reliefs (150 BCE): *bhagavato saka-munino Bodhi*, the "bodhi (tree) of the Lord Sakya Muni". The name Mahābodhi or "Great Bodhi" has been in use for more than twelve centuries from the time of Xuanzang and possibly before.¹²¹ The name of the pipal tree was *Bodhi druma*, or the 'tree of wisdom'. The area around the seat of the Buddha was called *Bodhi maṇḍa* while in later times, as again testified by Xuanzang, this was called the *vajrāsana* or Diamond Throne.

¹¹⁶ Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 112.

¹¹⁷ Agrawala, *Gupta Temple Architecture*, p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 53.

¹¹⁹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. vii.

¹²⁰ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*.

¹²¹ Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*.

Mahābodhi vihara is taken to describe the temple in most sources while the great monastery nearby was called *Mahābodhi Sanahārama*. There are inscriptions, such as one from 850 CE, that record the use of the name Mahābodhi: “during the reign of Dharmapāla for the benefit of the inhabitants of Mahābodhi (*Mahābodhi nivasinam*)”.¹²²

Architectural History and Stylistic Evolution of the Temple

Before detailing the architectural history of the structures erected throughout time in this site, one must note the events that highlighted the relevance of BG, cementing it as the centre of Buddhist cosmology and of trans-national pilgrim networks.

On his quest to Buddhahood, Siddhārtha Gautama travelled around Bihār, where he visited Rajgir and Uruvela before reaching the Phalgu River and arriving at the Bodhi tree. There it is claimed that the Bodhisattva spread some grass at the foot of the tree, turned his face to the East and sat crossed-legged:¹²³

*Blood may dry up, flesh may decay, bones may fall apart, but I will not leave this
place until I attain Enlightenment.*¹²⁴

Siddhārtha Gautama was to reach *nirvāṇa*, or *sambodhi*, under the bodhi tree. Legend states that on the day he was going to reach Enlightenment, Māra tried to render his meditative efforts useless by tempting the Bodhisattva. First Marā tried to tempt him with sensual pleasures, and then he attacked the Bodhisattva with winds, thunder, lightning, storms and hurricanes; but to no avail. Looking at Marā, Gautama stretched his right hand towards the ground and sat in earth-touching gesture:¹²⁵

*May this earth be my witness that I will attain Enlightenment and put an end to
the sorrows of mankind.*¹²⁶

The moment of Enlightenment is said to have caused the earth to shake and light up a thunderbolt in the sky. Then Marā retreated in defeat and the gods celebrated the Buddha’s victory. The Bodhisattva ventured into deep meditation, acquiring the knowledge of past

¹²² Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 3.

¹²³ Ahir, D.C., *Buddha Gaya Through the Ages* (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1994), p. 4.

¹²⁴ Louis de La Vallée Poussin and Edward Joseph Thomas, *Mahaniddesa* (Pali Text Society, 1978), p. 476.

¹²⁵ This gesture is also known as *Bhumisparsha Mudrā*. It is often represented in Buddhist art when the attainment of Buddhahood is depicted. It indicates the Buddha’s calling to the earth to witness his Enlightenment at BG.

¹²⁶ Ahir, *Buddha Gaya Through the Ages*, p. 4.

lives and divine vision; understanding the law of cause and effect; and gaining a number of insights. Then he attained Enlightenment at BG.¹²⁷

The *vajrāsana* was placed in the location where the Buddha is said to have attained sambodhi. Next to this spot was erected the Mahābodhi to commemorate the attainment of Buddhahood. Therefore, the Mahābodhi became the focal point of Buddhism and Buddhist pilgrimage. Soon after the Buddha's time, the Buddhist Emperor Aśoka visited BG and constructed the first shrine.

Aśokan Shrine and Railing

According to the *Aśokāvadāna*, as discussed in Chapter 2:¹²⁸

*Here at the seat of Enlightenment
the greatest of sages dispersed
and quickly repelled the forces of Namuci (Mara)
and here that peerless individual
attained everlasting, exalted,
supreme Enlightenment.
And hearing this the king made an offering of one hundred pieces of gold to the
bodhi tree and built a caitya there.*

After his first visit to BG, Aśoka appears to have become devoted to Buddhism. As recorded in the VIIIth Major Rock Edict, Aśoka started his pilgrimages after a visit to sambodhi, taken to represent the Mahābodhi site.¹²⁹ During his pilgrimage trips, Aśoka visited many people, instructing and teaching them the principles of the Buddhist *dharma*. This increased the popularity of Buddhism during Mauryan times.

Burmese inscriptions found at the site, tales from Chinese pilgrims who visited the Mahābodhi during medieval times, and bas reliefs from Sāñchī and Bharhut all reinforce the attribution of this first structure to the Mauryan Emperor.

During the excavations carried out by Cunningham, the remains of what he identifies as the original Aśokan temple were discovered. Cunningham states that finding these foundations and the *vajrāsana* proved the precinct was similar to what is as portrayed in the Bharhut

¹²⁷ This appears in the *Lalitavistara Sūtra*. Gwendolyn Bays, *The Voice of the Buddha: Lalitavistara Sūtra* (USA: Dharma Publishings, 1983).

¹²⁸ Strong, *Aśokāvadāna*, p. 248.

¹²⁹ See Chapter 2.

reliefs.¹³⁰ Nothing can be said of the foundations because only two small fragments are reported. However the slab or *vajrāsana* was Cunningham’s most important discovery while working on the Mahābodhi. His work confirmed that the present structure was built over some kind of earlier structure that stood in the early centuries BCE.

Cunningham takes the Bharhut relief as a literal representation, ignoring the variation indicated by reliefs from other sites. The most that can be said is there was a slab and a pillared pavilion around the tree.

Cunningham’s belief that the Bharhut representation was accurate shaped his interpretation of the archaeology. For instance, when repairing the floor of the temple, which was an uneven granite pavement that had to be re-laid, a throne was discovered. Behind this throne, an older one made of polished sandstone and with four pilasters in the front was found. This was the *vajrāsana*, whose overall look corresponded, according to Cunningham, to the depiction in the Bharhut relief. The *vajrāsana* was older than the temple housing it and its location gave Cunningham information about the structure that must have stood during the time of Aśoka.¹³¹

The south end of the slab was located 20 inches (0.5 m) away from the south wall of the temple, and its northern end was 39 inches (0.99 m) from the wall. Cunningham noted that the *vajrāsana* had a portion added which altered its dimensions displaced it from the centre of the chamber. Then Cunningham found two columns that sat equidistantly from the centre of the diamond throne. The column bases were located 10 feet 9 ½ inches (2.97 m) from the middle of the slab and were approximately 1 foot in diameter. Taking all these measurements into consideration, Cunningham concluded that the Aśokan shrine was approximately 12ft (3.65 m) long. He also located partial remains of old walls under the basement of the Mahābodhi (on the east, west and south sides) and a semi-circular step (characteristic of early doorways and gateways) which could have been the entrance. Although this is all speculation, these findings, the carvings from Bharhut, and the dimensions of the enclosure, led to Cunningham believing he had found the Aśokan temple (see Fig. 3.5).¹³²

Taking into account the types of early shrines described earlier in this Chapter, it seems likely that the Aśokan shrine was a platform under a tree enclosed by a railing.¹³³ Therefore, the first structure erected at the site was most likely a pillared pavilion, although whether or not

¹³⁰ See Figs. 2.1-2.2.

¹³¹ See Chapter 5.

¹³² See Appendix.

¹³³ See Chapter 2 for details about the erection of the platform surrounding the tree.

it was roofed remains to be discovered. Cunningham believed it had a rounded roof, again because of the Bharhut depictions, but there is no factual evidence that supports this statement. The Aśokan shrine could have had an umbrella, as other early shrines dating to the Mauryan times had, but stating that the Mahābodhi had a dolmenoid roof through which the tree grew is an assumption based solely on bas-reliefs carved many miles away, in Bharhut, by an artist who –probably– would not have visited BG.

Based on the descriptions given by Cunningham it seems sensible to conclude that there was a Mauryan-period structure at the site. This is supported by Xuanzang's description of the site.

Chinese pilgrims visit the Mahābodhi: Xuanzang's account. A well-established network of pilgrimage centred on the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment was in place by the medieval times. The pilgrim visits provide the first textual descriptions of the Mahābodhi. These descriptions of the temple and its precincts also confirm the position of the diamond throne within the enclosure and indicate how the Mahābodhi was experiencing further architectural development. In the fashion of South Asian shrines, a new structure was built (or layered on top) of the Aśokan shrine.

Faxian mentions the temple and the Buddha's Walk in the 4th century, attesting to its existence, but fails to provide architectural details in his descriptions.¹³⁴ However, Xuanzang's account of his visit to the temple in the 7th century provides information about the state of the Mahābodhi and the railing.¹³⁵ He also mentions that a Brahman had constructed the temple.¹³⁶

Cunningham claims that fractions of the Aśokan Railing still stood, a view he based on Xuanzang's account.¹³⁷ The coping of the Railing is described by Xuanzang as 1 foot 2 inches and the pillar measurements given as 6 feet 8 inches, so altogether 9 feet 10 inches in height. This corresponds with the height of the platform mentioned in the *Aśokāvadāna*.

However, it is important to note that the Railing that Xuanzang saw *in situ* was surrounding the temple, not the Aśokan shrine. Although the pillars, rail bars and copings date to Mauryan times, the railing was rearranged and expanded to fit the greater dimensions of the

¹³⁴ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 17.

¹³⁵ Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*.

¹³⁶ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 21-2.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 11; See Chapter 2.

Mahābodhi.¹³⁸ The Gupta temple was described by Xuanzang in his *Life and Travels* (see Fig. 3.6):¹³⁹

To the east of the Bodhi Tree there is a Vihara between 160 and 170 feet in height, with a base of about 20 paces (of 50 feet). It is built in bluish bricks, faced with plaster. It presents several tiers or niches, each of which holds a gilded statue of Buddha. On all four sides the walls are covered with beautiful sculptures, festoons of pearls, and figures of Rishis. On its summit there is a gilt copper Amalaka fruit. Afterwards on the eastern side (or front) there was added a pavilion of two storeys which presented three stages of projecting roofs. The architraves and pillars, the doors and the windows, are ornamented with gold and silver chasings, amongst which pearls and precious stones are inserted. (...) To the right and left of the outer door there are two large niches, that to the right containing a statue of Avalokiteswara, and that to the left a statue of Maitreya. Both statues are of silver, and about 10 feet in height.

This description of the Mahābodhi as it stood in 637 CE is remarkably close to the temple that Cunningham repaired in the late 19th century. It can therefore be concluded that the temple at BG, in spite of numerous interventions and repairs, is a Gupta structure.

Gupta Temple. After the breakup of the Kuṣāṇ Empire, Samudragupta (345-370 CE) founded the Gupta Empire in Bihār through his political, military and personal achievements.¹⁴⁰

During the Gupta period, India came into contact with several civilizations, borrowing motifs and architectural elements. From T-shaped doorframes to the plans of temples, elements were quickly adapted and incorporated into the Indian artistic and architectural vocabulary. The foundation for the Hindu temple architecture was laid then, with the emergence of a temple plan that comprised a square *garbhagrha* for the deity and a *maṇḍapa* for sheltering the devotee. The pressure to define the temple's form was linked to the philosophical and religious developments of the time, and especially to the focus on *bhakti* (or adoration of a deity) which led to the installation and worship of many popular Hindu and Buddhist deities.¹⁴¹ In the case of the Mahābodhi, a Buddha statue was enshrined.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 12.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 18.

¹⁴⁰ Meister, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*, p. 19.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁴² Meister, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*, pp. 105-7.

As Mahayana Buddhism ushered in worship of Buddhist icons and a pantheon of Buddhist divinities, with accompanying greater complexities in ritual, the modest Bodhighara or Vajrasana shrine could no longer satisfy devotees. To this older structure, a large temple adorned with images was added by at least the 4th century CE (...). A well-known Buddha image made of Mathura sandstone found from Bodhgaya and dated in the year 64 (most often equated to Gupta era 64/384 CE on the grounds of style) is likely to have adorned the local shrine. That a grand temple was in existence at the site of the Vajrasana during the early 6th century and that this prasada received grants in cash and kind for its upkeep and the maintenance of the daily worship of Buddha images enshrined in it and in an adjacent monastery is testified to by an early 6th century CE inscription added to the ancient railing. Another inscription dated 589 CE at the site refers to the construction of a prasada at Bodhimanda by a Sri Lankan monk Mahanaman, who belonged to the royal family. These references prove that the Vajrasana temple by the 5th and 6th centuries CE was a much larger structure than the original Aśoka-period shrine and that it was surrounded by other shrines embellished with images.

That addition and modification at this sacred site was a continuous process, even during the second and third centuries, may be inferred from a terracotta plaque (...) with an inscription of the 2nd or 3rd century CE.¹⁴³

The brick Mahābodhi was a 7th century Gupta design that included elements such as a *śikhara* over the *garbhagrha*.¹⁴⁴ This can be attested by the presence of vaulted ceilings of compartments, by the tall lancet window in the upper storey and by how the *garbhagrha* carried a *śikhara* of straight-edged pyramidal design (demarcated into seven storeys by corner *bhumi-amalakas*). These characteristics place the Mahābodhi's construction in the time of the later Guptas (500-700 CE).

Since the 7th century the Mahābodhi has undergone additions, restorations and excavations, but its style has remained constant. It becomes evident from Xuanzang's description of the temple that the Mahābodhi that Cunningham saw and repaired was the structure the Chinese pilgrim had seen in 637 CE. Cunningham provided a number of comparisons to reinforce this hypothesis in *Mahābodhi*:¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ This is the Kumrahar plaque.

¹⁴⁴ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. vii.

¹⁴⁵ Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*, p. 12.

1st. The dimensions of the two temples are exactly the same, the present building being 48 feet square at its base, and between 160 and 170 feet in height. In 1861 my measurements of its height, in its broken state, was 160 feet from the floor of the chamber to the top of the ruined pinnacle. It is now, after repair of the pinnacle, upwards 170 feet.

2nd. It is built of bluish bricks, with a coating of plaster.

3rd. The four faces present several tiers of niches, rising one above the other, each of which, no doubt, once held a Buddhist figure. Only three figures remained when I first saw the building.

4th. The entrance on the eastern side was certainly an addition to the original building, as its courses of bricks did not correspond with those of the main body of the Temple.¹⁴⁶

Although there is little scholarly disagreement about the dating of the Mahābodhi's architectural style, the same cannot be said for the circumstances surrounding its construction.

Mahābodhi Temple: Confusions Surrounding its Construction

There are different theories of attribution in relation to the erection of the temple. Some scholars claim the temple was locally built, while others say the Gupta temple was a Sri Lankan structure. The latter view appears to be the most widely accepted theory by academics, although it is my belief that this is an incorrect assumption. This confusion derives from a 19th century mistake, when the claim was published in scholarly journals, and from a Gupta inscription found at BG.

According to the *Mahāvamsa*, the King of Sri Lanka is said to have sent a gift to Samudragupta after two Sri Lankan monks said they were ill-treated while on pilgrimage at BG. The Gupta king in turn allowed the Sri Lankans to build a monastery and a temple at the site. Incorrectly, some scholars have then attributed the erection of the Gupta Mahābodhi to the Sri Lankans, when what they in fact constructed was almost certainly a subsidiary temple in the premises of the Mahābodhi.

This can be demonstrated by carefully studying the rubbing of an inscription now kept in the British Museum (see Fig. 3.7). Although the original inscription was found on the site of the

¹⁴⁶ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 18.

Mahābodhi by the British during the restoration works, it has since disappeared. All that has survived is the rubbing that Cunningham made in ink on paper.¹⁴⁷

The inscription is dated year 267, in the month of *caitra* on the 8th day of the śudi fortnight. This date is generally accepted as belonging to the Gupta era and thus refers to 586-87 CE. The inscription details the gifts sent by the Sri Lankan king and the subsequent erection of a Sri Lankan temple at BG by a monk called Mahānāman. This is a source for further confusion since many scholars have believed this Mahānāman to be the person who wrote -or compiled the texts that went into- the Mahāvamsa in the 5th century CE. However, Mahānāman was not an uncommon name and the person named in the BG inscription was most-likely another monk by the same name, related to the Sri Lankan royal family.

The inscription says the following between lines 9-11:¹⁴⁸

This beautiful mansion of the Teacher of mankind, dazzling white as the rays of the moon ... has been caused to be made by him ... whose excellent name was Mahānāman, born in the island of Laṅkā.

By the time Asher's books were published in the 1980s, the conflation surrounding the erection of the Gupta Mahābodhi was in place. In *Bodh Gaya: a Monumental Legacy*, Asher states the following:¹⁴⁹

It seems more likely, however, that the major change in the temple came during the Gupta period (...) when the railing around the temple was enlarged by the addition of several sculptured uprights and cross-bars that clearly date to this time. If the major modification of the temple was done during the Gupta period, as the expanded railing suggests, it may have been undertaken by a community of Sri Lankan monks who apparently settled at Bodh Gaya during the 5th century and exerted considerable authority over the site.

D.C. Ahir also wrote the following on the matter:¹⁵⁰

According to Cunningham, the historian Mahānāman "was the uncle of Raja Dhatu Sena, the heir of Raja Mitra Sena, who was conquered and killed by the

¹⁴⁷ It has been claimed that the original inscription is in the Indian Museum, but it has not been seen since the late 19th century.

¹⁴⁸ See Appendix for the full text of the inscription.

¹⁴⁹ F. Asher, *Bodh Gaya: Monumental Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 25.

¹⁵⁰ Ahir, *Bodh Gaya Through the Ages*, p. 27.

invader Pandu, in AD 433, when Dhatu Sena and his uncle escaped... he may have visited the Bodhi Tree in Magadha, where he built a temple and dedicated a statue.

The confusion started as soon as the Chinese pilgrim records in were translated.¹⁵¹ Somebody erroneously connected the records with the BG inscription, which was later published by John Faithful Fleet in 1888; it could have been Fleet himself.¹⁵² In any case, this led to the idea of a connection between the Mahābodhi and the Sri Lankans, a connection subsequently favoured by scholars such as John Guy and Krishna Devi in the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*.

Archival evidence points to the contrary: the Mahābodhi was locally built. For example, the proportions of the inscription would indicate that it belonged to a smaller structure, not the Mahābodhi itself. During his time at BG, Cunningham identified what he claimed was the Mahānāman temple, and it was in the precincts of the Mahābodhi. This location is mapped in his handwriting on a site plan of BG in the BM collections (see Fig. 3.8). Unfortunately, the Sri Lankan temple has not survived, but its foundations are still in place. During my research trip to the site, I was able to locate these foundations. They now house a Chinese shrine. After examining the dimensions, it seems likely that the temple that once stood there would have been considerably smaller than the Mahābodhi in scale, and therefore a better fit for the dimensions of the Sri Lankan.

Although the Mahābodhi was Indian in form and style, it is important to note the importance of the Sri Lankan presence at BG. They did not build the main temple, but they were the ones looking after the temple complex.

Burmese Repairs and Epigraphical Evidence. By the 11th century CE (Pāla era), BG was long-established as the focus of a trans-national Buddhist pilgrimage network. In addition to the Sri Lankan monks at the site, the Burmese were also a growing presence at BG. It was they who repaired the Mahābodhi in the 11th century, when they added some sections to the existing Gupta structure.

¹⁵¹ Beal gave the following translation of Xuanzang's description of the Mahābodhi: '*Outside the northern gate of the wall of the bodhi tree is the Mahābodhisangharama. It was built by a former king of Sinhala (Ceylon). This edifice has six halls, with towers of observation (temple towers) of three storeys; it is surrounded by a wall of defence thirty or forty feet high. The utmost skill of the artist has been employed; the ornamentation is in the richest of colours (red and blue). The statue of Buddha is cast of gold and silver, decorated with gems and precious stones. The stupas are high and large in proportion, and beautifully ornamented; they contain relics of Buddha*'. Beal, *Buddhist Records*, 133.

¹⁵² J. F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1888).

Cunningham provides a description of the Burmese interventions at BG in *Mahābodhi*.¹⁵³

(...) another massive addition was made to the buttress, forming a great niche in the middle, the remains of which are well shown in the photograph. The west facing of this work formed a grand entrance of richly carved basalt, of which only the sill now remains. From its style I judge it to belong to the 10th or 11th century CE, when the use of fine basalt became common. This work I believe to have been done by the Burmese, between AD 1035 and 1086. (see Fig. 3.9)

The Burmese seems carried out a thorough repair and restoration of the Mahābodhi. The details of these extensive repairs, undertaken from 1035-79 CE, were recorded by the Burmese themselves in an inscription dated 1079 CE. The earlier date 1035 CE was found on a gilded copper umbrella top, which was the gift of Dharma Raja Guru, the person assigned by the king of Burma to repair the Mahābodhi. There was a second Burmese inscription found on a stone slab at BG, from which we learn that as the repairs were not finished by this officer, but by a second agent sent in 1071 CE. He succeeded in completing the restoration in 7 years and 10 months, therefore finishing in 1079 CE.¹⁵⁴

The first of these inscriptions was engraved on a copper-gilt umbrella and found by Beglar. It was buried 8 feet under the modern ground level, to the west of the. The inscription was carved in both Burmese and medieval Nāgarī characters, of which only the Indian script was legible. Cunningham translated it as follows:¹⁵⁵

Sam 397, Sri Dharma Raja Guru.

This year refers to the Burmese year 638 AD, which therefore determines the period of Dharma Raja Guru's visit to BG as 1035 CE.

The second Burmese inscription (1296-8) was inscribed on a stone slab and discovered fixed on a wall of the BG Mahant's residence. There Cunningham claims to have seen it in 1862. The inscription provides a record of the history of the Mahābodhi and its successive repairs. The following is a brief abstract of the information listed in the inscription:¹⁵⁶

1. *Aśoka built the first temple.*
2. *Temple rebuilt by Naik Mahanta.*

¹⁵³ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. viii.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ See Appendix for full text of the inscription.

3. *Temple restored by Raja Sado-Meng*
4. *Raja Sempyu-Sakhen-tara-Mengyi deputed his Guru, Sri Dhamma Raja-Guna, to supervise the restoration of the temple: work not completed.*
5. *Varadasi Naik Thera petitioned the Raja to undertake the work, which was then entrusted to "the younger Pyu-Sakheng" and his minister, Ratha.*¹⁵⁷

Cunningham reached the following conclusions about what he believed to be the 11th century Burmese works on the Mahābodhi.¹⁵⁸

1. *Complete repair and restoration of all the walls, including stucco facing.*
2. *Complete renewal of the pinnacle of the Temple. This is proved by the discovery of a short Burmese inscription on one of the bricks of the conventional amalaka fruit or crenelated wheel of the pinnacle. (...)*
3. *The addition of two side buttresses to the right and left of the great central buttress, containing the great cell, is, perhaps, a later work. These were built with good lime mortar, similar to that used in the pinnacle just described. It seems certain, therefore, that these two works belong to much about the same period. That the great repairs to the Temple were done in the medieval period is, I think, clearly shown by the terracotta figure which was found in one of the top niches of the east side of the Temple, as the letters of its two inscribed seals belong to 10-11th century CE.*

From the length of time taken by the Burmese in making their repairs, I have no doubt that their work embraced the complete restoration of the whole building. I suppose that the masons, who must have been chiefly Bengalis, did not scruple to alter the style and character of the mouldings, but only in their details, while they left all the principal features of architecture unchanged.

The main Burmese addition was the great buttress at the back of the temple (see Fig. 3.10). This photograph shows how the buttress was later pushed outwards by the roots of the bodhi tree. The bold mouldings above the lowest line of niches were exposed; the original mouldings consisted of a double line of plain dentils, above which was a long line of circular flowers made in brick. On the buttress itself, and on the remaining exposed niches of the Mahābodhi, the row of flowers was changed into a line of half diamonds. The upper row of

¹⁵⁷ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 28.

dentils was replaced by lion heads, with garlands suspended from mouth to mouth, while the lower row of dentils changed into a line of alternate pilasters and human figures.¹⁵⁹

These details indicate that the Burmese intervention was centred on the back buttress and the temple's ornamentation. No significant structural changes were made to the rest of the Mahābodhi.

Pāla Era at BG and the Decline of Buddhism. The Pāla Empire ruled India from 750-1174 CE. It was run by a Buddhist dynasty based in Bengal that followed the Mahayana and Tantric schools of Buddhism. The Pālas were known for their support of the arts, predominantly literature and sculpture, which led to excellent sculptural achievements following the Pāla style.

BG saw its most enriching artistic period during the 9th to 12th centuries under the Pālas. Most of the sculptures that adorned the Mahābodhi were made and fitted into the niches in the facades of the temple during this time. The Pāla kings consecrated many images at BG and left numerous inscriptions recording their visits and offerings, all of which date to before the 12th century CE. The Pālas focused on the enshrinement of Buddhist sculptures, and did not alter significantly the architecture of the temple. They added two small sections to the main structure.¹⁶⁰

The last addition consisted of two square buttresses, one on each side of the central buttress. These two works were built entirely of good bricks and lime mortar, and their lower mouldings did not coincide with those of the old Temple and central buttress (added by the Burmese). This work was probably executed by some of the later Pāla Kings in the 12th century, when the great central buttress had shown signs of yielding to the pressure of the roots of the holy Pipal Tree above.

During the 12th century, Buddhism is said to have entered a period of decline.¹⁶¹ This was recorded on inscriptions found at BG. The epigraphic evidence, amongst which is an inscription detailing appeals by the Pālas to other important Buddhist kings (Aśoka-balla) for assistance in maintaining Buddhism, provides an important insight into the situation at BG during that time.

¹⁵⁹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

¹⁶¹ See Chapter 2.

Repairs to the Mahābodhi are said to have been made in the latter half of the 12th century by Aśoka-balla, king of Sapada-laksha, when he appointed a Buddhist priest, Dharma Rakshita, to complete the task. Four inscriptions of Aśoka-balla have been found: one in Gaya and the other three in the precincts of the Mahābodhi.¹⁶² Unfortunately, none of these list the works done to the Mahābodhi, but rather mention the building of smaller temples, the enshrinement of images and other rituals. Therefore, whether or not the Pālas altered the structure of the Mahābodhi is yet to be proven.

The Mahābodhi under the Mahant. Shortly after the time of Aśoka-balla, the expansion of the Delhi Sultanate reached Eastern India.¹⁶³ The arrival of Islam did not deter Buddhist pilgrims from Tibet, Nepal, and Burma to continue to visit BG and records indicate their presence in 1298, 1302, 1328 and 1331 CE.¹⁶⁴ However, these pilgrims could no longer build temples or dedicate stūpas. This would be an indication that the architecture of the Mahābodhi and of the votive stupas that surrounded it was left unaltered.

The Brahmanical presence in and around BG was also augmenting during this time.¹⁶⁵ A round stone with the sculptured feet of Viṣṇu dated to 1308 was placed by the Mahābodhi. The piece would have originally been a dome of a Buddhist stupa. Other Hindu sculptures were also found scattered around the site and under the bodhi tree.

The Brahmans took control of the site in the 14th century CE. They established a small community at BG, which gradually grew under the rule of the Mahant. It was in his residence that many sculptures, architectural fragments and inscriptions (Chinese and Burmese), from the Mahābodhi were later found by the British in the late 19th century CE.

Cunningham suggests that the Mahābodhi was left deserted for some time before the Brahmans adopted the temple as a Hindu shrine. However, they did not carry out repairs to the temple in the following six centuries, reason why the Mahābodhi was in a ruinous state by the mid-19th century. It was then that the Burmese once again attempted to repair the temple at BG, but they were stopped by the British (see Fig. 3.11).

Replicas of the Temple: the Mahābodhi in Bagan

With the Hindus looking after the Mahābodhi and the Muslims ruling Eastern India, Buddhist pilgrims started to face numerous challenges in order to visit the sacred sites in Bihār. They

¹⁶² Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p.78.

¹⁶³ See Chapter 2.

¹⁶⁴ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, pp. 56-7.

¹⁶⁵ Amar, "Bodh Gaya and Gaya: Buddhist Responses to Brahma Challenges in Early Medieval India", pp. 555-85.

were discouraged from visiting India and therefore required other ways in which to symbolically complete their visits to the sites. Numerous small models of the Mahābodhi were made and enshrined elsewhere in Asia, for example in Tibet, so they would provide an alternative for pilgrims wishing to but unable to visit BG. Another approach, mainly favoured in South East Asia, was the erection of a replica of the Mahābodhi temple.¹⁶⁶ Asher states the following:¹⁶⁷

(...) it may be significant that the temples reflecting the form of the Mahābodhi temple were constructed relatively late, that is, only beginning in the twelfth century. This may be because with the fall of the Pāla dynasty, pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya itself became increasingly difficult, and in any event, Bodh Gaya was clearly not well maintained, as periodic repairs by Buddhists from outside India indicate. Thus, the models would have sought to replicate the experience at Bodh Gaya when access to the actual site was very difficult.

The most important of these replicas dates to the 13 century (1218 CE) and was erected in Bagan, the capital of the Kingdom of the Burmese kingdom from the 9th-13th centuries CE (see Fig. 3.12).

The Burmese replica of the Mahābodhi was built during the reign of King Htilominlo, and it is the closest copy in existence of the Gupta Mahābodhi. Although smaller in scale, its design is Indian. It also had a pyramidal tower and many shrines housing over 400 Buddha images. This Burmese temple, which has remained mostly unaltered in the centuries following its erection, is the most viable representation of how the Mahābodhi at BG looked after the Burmese restorations; the replica in Bagan also has the buttress at the back, where its very own bodhi tree was housed.

The replicas of the Mahābodhi, both the temples and models, played a crucial role during the restoration works of the original Mahābodhi in Bihār. Beglar carefully studied these before drawing the plans for the restoration works led by him and Cunningham.

¹⁶⁶ *The Mahābodhi temple has been so profoundly important to Buddhists distant from BG that a number of temples intentionally reflecting its form have been built at other sites. These temples provide a localized metaphoric pilgrimage to BG. John Guy has identified seven full-scale temples that are modelled on the Mahābodhi temple, including two in Myanmar (Burma), two in Thailand, two in China and one in Nepal. Of these, an especially faithful copy is the Mahābodhi temple in Bagan, Myanmar, constructed (...) at a time when the Burmese took special interest in BG. The somewhat earlier Shwegugyi, constructed in 1131 in Bagan also reflects the appearance of the Mahābodhi temple. Asher, Bodh Gaya: Monumental Legacy, pp. 29-30.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid, p. 31.*

The Mahābodhi Temple in the 19th century: Excavations and Restoration Works

The Mahābodhi attracted the attention of collectors, antiquarians and scholars from the early days of British rule in India. Notices were published in the beginning of the 19th century, and as early as 1809-11 CE people such as Buchanan Hamilton were visiting BG. In the 1860's Cunningham visited the site for the first time and subsequently published his research in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. He later published these initial observations of the temple and the state of the site in the first volume of the *Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India*.¹⁶⁸ It was after Cunningham's visit that some recommendations were made towards the upkeep of the Mahābodhi. These suggestions did not focus on the restoration of the temple, but rather on excavating the site and on locating valuable objects. Major Mead was the person appointed by the Government to carry out these excavation works and it was he who invited Mitra to visit BG. Mitra's observations were subsequently published in *Buddha Gaya*. Major Mead described the 1864 excavation works as follows:¹⁶⁹

On the north and west fronts I found that the external walls of the platform were modern, and apparently not founded on the original solid ground, but in the mud soil which has accumulated.

In front of the temple I found that the court-yard was paved with a granite floor 34 feet in width, and the whole length of the (eastern) front of the temple, which terminates under a cut-stone moulded plinth, which no doubt carried some sort of ornamental fence dividing off this inner court from the exterior (see basalt plinth in the accompanying plan, Plate IV, plan no.1. (The 34 feet must be measured from the doorway of the entrance hall B, as the width of the pavement from the actual outer walls of N.N. is only 17 feet from the basalt plinth. The granite pavement also extends beyond this plinth as far as the brick archway).

The eastern external trench running in front of this archway from south to north yielded a considerable quantity of masonry in situ, and large numbers of handsomely-carved model stupas, of which some hundreds of specimens have been disinterred by our excavations. I consequently enlarged the trench here to above 20 feet in width, and endeavoured to trace these walls, which turned out to be the lower portions of four small single cell temples or shrines, the upper portions of which are gone. In one of the most complete (...).

¹⁶⁸ Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, p. v.

¹⁶⁹ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, pp. 87-8.

*Of the four internal trenches, that along the southern face of the temple has been excavated. It has exposed the southern basement of the temple, which is singularly perfect and handsome, although entirely in plaster. **Here we obtained the corroded remains of two or three small bronze trumpets, ** and about 28 feet from the south-west corner of the temple this trench disclosed a broken pillar and rail of what in your instructions you term the Buddhist railing.*

*On seeing this I decided ** to take the internal western trench along the line of this railing, and doing so, I found the railing still all along the in place, except that every post had been broken off just above the insertion of the lowest rail, save only the two at an opening in the middle opposite the holy peepul tree. The two pillars standing are nearly perfect, with carving on two adjacent sides in view of the usual mortice holes.*

Mitra visited BG 1863, while Mead worked on the site, and drafted a rough plan of the site that was later published with his observations in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. However, it was Cunningham who produced the first official set of architectural plans of the Mahābodhi after his second visit to the site in 1871, when Mead had completed the excavations.

Even though much effort was put into excavating and architecturally mapping the site, with scholarly works being published on the matter, little or no attention was paid to the Mahābodhi itself. The British completed a survey of the state of the site and temple, excavated trenches, exposed the railing and reassembled a number of stupas, but they did not restore the temple. As a result, the Burmese decided to intervene with the aim of reconstructing the ruinous temple.

Anglo-Burmese Tensions: Wars and Temples. The 19th century was a tense one between the Burmese and the British, who then ruled over most of the Indian sub-continent. In the midst of the three Anglo-Burmese wars (1824-6; 1852-3 and 1885-86), the Burmese again ventured into Bihār to undertake the repairs of the Mahābodhi.¹⁷⁰ The Buddhist king of Burma sent three officers to supervise the works at BG. They arrived in 1877, between the second and third Anglo-Burmese wars, with the aims of restoring the Mahābodhi and re-establishing pilgrimages to the site.

¹⁷⁰ The Burmese first restored the Mahābodhi in the 11th century. See section *Burmese Repairs and Epigraphical Evidence* in this Chapter.

With the British keen on showing their power in the region and their supremacy over Burma, the Burmese team working on the site of the Mahābodhi Temple was expelled in the 1870s and replaced by a British one. The British were in the midst of trying to realign the Buddhist structure and centre of power, which was held by the Burmese kings of Upper Burma. They were attempting to undermine the religious power of the Buddhist king. The majority of the people in Upper Burma were Theravada Buddhists (approximately 98% of the population), and their culture and society was strongly influenced by the principles of the religion. Their kings supported both local and foreign temples; the Mahābodhi was among the foreign ones they patronised. The British, wanting to gain political control of Upper Burma, stopped the Burmese team at BG. This was a demonstration of the British colonial determination that saw them dominating India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Burma, etc...

The British team, led by Mead, Beglar and Cunningham, proceeded to carry out further excavations and reconstruct the Mahābodhi. In Mitra's preface to *Buddha Gaya* the situation at BG in the 1870s is explained (see Fig. 3.13):¹⁷¹

In the winter of 1876 the late king of Burmah deputed three of his officers to superintend the repairs of the ancient temple at Buddha Gaya. The men arrived at the place in January 1877, and immediately set to work. With the permission of the Mahant, in whose charge the temple was kept, they cleared away a large space around it, built an enclosing wall, renewed the retaining walls of the terrace of the temple, replastered its interior, and took some steps for preserving the sacred Bodhi tree. In the course of their work they brought to light a great number of votive stupas, images, friezes, impressions of the sacred feet, and other objects of antiquarian interest. Some of these were built into the new wall, others lay scattered about the place.

The subject was brought to the notice of the Government of Bengal in the middle of last year, and suggestions made to prevent the masking and modernizing of the ancient temple. Thereupon a demi-official letter was written to me by Sir Stuart Bayley, the Secretary of the Government of Bengal, and in it the wishes of the Government were thus set forth: --"It is not desired to interfere with the Burmese gentlemen beyond giving them such guidance as may prevent any serious injury being done to the temple, of which there seemed at one time some danger from their laying bare a portion of the foundation; and to arrange for such of the antiquities as are worth being properly taken care of. They are at

¹⁷¹ Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, pp. iii-v.

present building them into walls, and sticking foolish heads on to ancient torsos, &c. Mr. Eden wishes to know if you can make it convenient to pay a visit to Buddha Gaya to inspect the work and the remains collected, and to give advice as to their value and to their disposition, and whether there are any that should go to the Asiatic Society; and generally to advise the Government in regard to the manner in which the operations of the Burmese excavators should be controlled.”

In compliance with the wishes of His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, I visited Buddha Gaya in the autumn of 1877, and in the course of my inquiries collected much information and many drawings, maps, and plans (...).

Immediately after Cunningham’s visit he recommended that measures should be adopted to carry on excavations round the temple, to trace the sites of the different edifices which at one time surrounded it, and to bring to light such objects of antiquarian value as may be found buried there. The work of excavation was undertaken by Major Mead (...).

Cunningham re-visited BG to see what had been done by the Burmese team. After his second visit in the 1870s, when he saw the extent of the Burmese surface clearings and overall intervention, he noted the following:¹⁷²

I visited Buddha Gaya in 1879 for the express purpose of seeing what had been done by the Burmese. Their clearances had not been carried out deep enough to expose the more ancient monuments which still existed on or near the original level of the ground on which the Temple was built. The clearances also had not been made with any discrimination. Everything was removed as it became exposed; and thus many of the hemispherical domes of the rows of early votive stupas were thrown down. Fortunately they were not carried away, and when the great clearance of the ruins was subsequently made by Mr Beglar, many of these stone hemispheres were restored to their original stupas, the remains of which had not been disturbed.

Whether or not the Burmese works were a threat to the Mahābodhi temple is unknown. We do not have accounts from the Burmese people that worked on the site. We know of their interventions only from the British perspective. Considering the Anglo-Burmese tensions, the British remarks of the Burmese works have to be regarded as partial. On a separate note, it is

¹⁷² Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. v.

important to highlight that the art historical approaches of the Burmese and the British were likely different. While the British were keen on preserving the antiquity of the Mahābodhi, it is not an unusual practice in numerous parts of Asia (like Tibet and Burma), to discard ancient elements or sculptures that are broken, and substitute them with modern components. The importance attributed to the 'ancient' structures appears to be different. Both sides had legitimate approaches, but the British plan was the one completed.

State of the Temple in 1880. The state the Mahābodhi temple was in after the Burmese intervention prompted the British to restore it. Recognizing its value as a historic shrine the team lead by Cunningham and Beglar started the restoration of the temple in the 1880's.

The following is an excerpt published in 1880 in the *Englishman Newspaper* (Kolkata), written by a reporter who went to see the temple in 1879. It described the decaying state of the Mahābodhi:¹⁷³

I found the Temple in the following condition: The whole plinth and lower mouldings buried under accumulations of rubbish; the floor of the sanctum, and of the great hall in front 4 feet lower than the level of a rough stone floor laid by the Burmese, who had partially cleared away the heaps of rubbish in front, the great hall roofless; the half-hall, or porch of the second storey, roofless; the whole of the front of the Temple above the level of the third chamber fallen, disclosing a great triangular gap, about 20 feet high and 12 feet wide at base; the stairs leading up from lowest floor, or ground floor or terrace, from which the tower springs, roofless; the whole of the façade of the platform to the East a mound of ruins; the whole south façade of platform ruinous, but retaining here and there portions of original work; the entire West face of the platform of the Temple buried under rubbish, which itself was held up by a revetment wall 32 feet high of plain brick and mortar, unplastered, and looking for all the world like a dilapidated jail wall. The holy tree at the apex of a series of a circle of steps, which stood on the rubbish so held up by the revetment aforesaid, and the entire north wall above the then ground level a plain blank wall of mud and brickbats, which was even then leaning outwards. A massive new-plastered staircase [is] stuck on the East front or main façade at its north-east angle to give access to the terrace of the upper chamber, and to the holy tree... The entire West face of main tower peeled off, including the half of the upper pinnacle, the rest of the pinnacle overhanging. The entire North face of tower, except the upper portion,

¹⁷³ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, pp. v-vi.

peeled off; the East face in fair order above the great triangular gap already noticed; the South face in fairish order, the terrace or platform extensively cracked in all directions, the corbelled work in the third chamber, interior, overhanging in a most dangerous condition, the chamber at the same time being inaccessible.

This report of an independent correspondent reached the British Government, which in turn ordered the restoration of the Mahābodhi.¹⁷⁴

British Repairs. In 1880, Ashley Eden, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, appointed Beglar who was one of Cunningham's assistants, to carry out the repairs. Cunningham detailed in *Mahābodhi* the design strategies followed during the restoration works:¹⁷⁵

The greater part of the stucco facing had disappeared, and the brick walls, being laid only with clay mortar, had peeled off on all sides, more especially on the West face, where in many places the bricks had fallen away to a depth of nearly 5 feet. But a sufficient number of tolerably well-preserved portions of the mouldings and niches on the other faces still remained to enable the restorer to complete the repair of the whole in the exact pattern of the original. This extensive renewal of the surface was absolutely necessary to ensure the future safety of the building. No new features were added, the restoration being limited to a strict repetition of the existing niches and mouldings.

The repairs of the Mahābodhi officially began in 1880, commencing with the clearance of rubbish that caused the temple to flood during the monsoon season. During this clearance, the different additions made to the temple were uncovered. Simultaneously, the interior pavement that had become uneven was taken up and re-laid. This intervention also brought to light the alterations made at different times to the inside of the Mahābodhi.¹⁷⁶

Besides the restoration of the surfaces, there were two major interventions done by the British team: (1) the removal of the buttresses; and (2) the restoration of the front pavilion, including the central tower.

First, the British removed the buttress to the back (west) of the temple.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Ahir, *Buddha Gaya Through the Ages*, p. 91.

¹⁷⁵ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. vi.

¹⁷⁷ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, pp. 18-9.

(...) The discoveries made during the removal of the ruinous buttresses on the west side, or back, of the building were more decisive of the antiquity of the main body of the Temple. On this west face there was a row of 13 niches, each containing a Buddhist figure. Five of these niches were hidden by the addition of the great central buttress, but their statues, their mouldings, and their ornaments, were all left untouched. As the concealed statues were all of the Gupta style of sculpture, while those of the buttress itself were all of a much later period, there can be no doubt that this central buttress was an after addition to the original building.

At a still later period two additional small buttresses (...) were added, one on each side of the central buttress. As each of these covered two niches, there remained in view only two niches of the original wall on each side.

The removal of the great buttress disclosed the curious fact that it was itself not a single work, but the result of several distinct and separate additions, which were undoubtedly made at different times. (...) These successive additions throw a flood of light on the history of the Temple.

It was agreed that the Gupta temple was the original one, and therefore all the additions built after that time were cleared. This process exposed niches of Gupta-style stucco figures that unfortunately disintegrated when exposed. The elimination of the back buttress also led to the removal of the bodhi tree.¹⁷⁸

The second biggest intervention by the British centred on the front pavilion of the Mahābodhi. The creative license adopted by Beglar when designing the tower of the temple generated controversy, but Cunningham stood by Beglar's design. He explained why in the Preface to *Mahābodhi*:¹⁷⁹

(...) the front Pavilion of the Temple was almost a complete ruin; and at first it did not seem likely that any authority could be found for even its partial renewal. My advice was that the ruined walls should be well plastered with cement simply to prevent further decay. This was actually begun, as seen by one of Mr Beglar's photographs. But a short time afterwards a small model in stone of the Temple was found amongst the ruins, from which the whole design of the building as it

¹⁷⁸ See Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. ix.

existed in mediaeval times could be traced with tolerable completeness. From this model, and from the still existing remains of the façade, Mr Beglar designed the front Pavilion as it now stands. On the same authority he designed the four corner Pavilions, which are seen in all the photographs of the restored Temple. This additional work has been much criticised, and I have been roundly abused for it in company with Mr Beglar, although I had nothing whatever to say in it. At the same time I must confess that, since I have seen it, I think his design of the front Pavilion is a very successful completion of the entrance in the style and spirit of the original work shown in the model. It is of course a 'Restoration', which, as it was based on the double authority of existing remains and an ancient model, I consider legitimate and justifiable.

From carefully studying the photographs taken by Beglar and Cunningham, before and after their works, the changes made to the temple structure can be identified.

The Restored Mahābodhi Temple. Although these additions in their present form may not correspond exactly to how the temple looked in the medieval period, few can doubt that Beglar's restoration gave the temple back its majesty (see Fig. 3.14). Beglar understood that the Mahābodhi Temple was never meant to be a dead relic for students of archaeology and architecture to study, but a celebration in brick and stone of the Buddha's enlightenment and a proper temple where Buddhists could come and worship.¹⁸⁰

The temple of the 1880s stood on top of all the older versions of it. The Mahābodhi had its back buttresses removed; the bodhi tree replanted on the ground floor at the back of the temple, next to the exposed vajrāsana; its tower widened and restored to the height it had during the Gupta era; the broken pinnacle fixed; the four side towers added on to the second storey; the inner chamber reconstructed and its floors levelled; the temple niches were replastered or rebuilt (resulting in abstract representations of the earlier); Buddha images were re-enshrined; votive stupas were reassembled and erected in the precincts of the temple; and the railing was cleared.

The finishing touch of the restoration came from the hands of Beglar, who noticed that the Mahābodhi was missing its Buddha image. The sculpture, a gilded Buddha image in the earth-touching position dating to circa the 10th century CE, was in the Mahant's residence.¹⁸¹ Cunningham brought it back to the precincts of the Mahābodhi and Beglar proceeded to re-enshrine it, completing the restoration works.

¹⁸⁰ Ahir, *Buddha Gaya Through the Ages*, p. 92.

¹⁸¹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*.

The restoration process was documented by Beglar and Cunningham in a number of photographs, sketches and architectural plans now kept in the BM. These materials, published here for the first time, are of immense value as they allow us to illustrate the work of the British at BG. These images provide a visual timeline of the restoration of the Mahābodhi temple (see Figs. 3.1-3.XXI for timeline).

Conclusion

The Mahābodhi temple is important as it represents one of the oldest examples of Indian art and architecture. From the first shrine, dating to the Mauryan times, to the restoration works completed by the British in the late 19th century CE, the Mahābodhi has been subject to numerous additions and restorations. It is in these layers that the history of the temple is written.

This chapter provides an archaeology of the architecture of Buddhism's most important temple in India. The Mahābodhi's complex architectural history has seen it transform in form and style. It started as a shrine by the vajrāsana and bodhi tree before being made into a temple in the early centuries CE, as the flow of pilgrims to BG increased. It was again enlarged during the 7th century. It is then in the Gupta era that the Mahābodhi's architectural form reaches its peak; the temple has subsequently remained to be a Gupta-inspired design. In the following centuries, under the Indian Pāla kings, numerous statues were enshrined, and a number of additions built (the main being built by the Burmese, who also repaired the temple, in the 11th century CE). Shortly after, Buddhism experienced a decline and Islam arrived in Bihār. With the access to the site restricted, copies of the Mahābodhi were erected elsewhere in Asia. The reduced Buddhist presence also enabled the Brahmans to appropriate the shrine, which remained under the governance of the Mahant (a Śiva follower) until the 19th century CE. It was in this century when the Burmese, in the midst of the Anglo-Burmese wars, set off to restore the Mahābodhi with the aim of resuming pilgrimages to BG. Their works were abruptly stopped, and deemed inadequate, by the British who in turn resolved to appoint Beglar and Cunningham to restore the temple. The restoration works commenced in 1880 and were completed in the years to follow.

Regardless of the controversies surrounding the design plans and strategies devised by the British, the restoration of the Mahābodhi temple was successful in many ways. Not only is the structure still standing and in good condition, with the temple being under the care of a committee in charge of its upkeep, but BG has also been effectively re-established as the centre of Buddhist pilgrimage. The Mahābodhi has regained its place amongst Buddhists,

receiving countless pilgrims from all over the world who wish to visit to the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

Chapter 4 –Sculptures and Material

The history of key elements of the site at BG has been misunderstood, therefore leading to a number of widespread yet erroneous conclusions surrounding the temple's architecture and pilgrimage routes centred round the site. This chapter aims to re-examine important sculptural examples from the Mahābodhi temple and its precincts. The study of these materials, held in the London and Indian collections, and others which remain under active worship in the site, will provide a chronological overview of the sculptures at BG. This will subsequently help illustrate stylistic evolutions of sculptural material from the Mahābodhi site. The chronological description provided will serve as a platform to re-evaluate styles and dates. The histories of key pieces such as the vajrāsana, the Aśokan pillar and the main Buddha inside the Mahābodhi temple will receive special emphasis. Additionally, an analysis of votive offerings and an overall critical revision of the material from BG will be included.

The collections held in the BM and the V&A Museum, although differing in content, complement each other, thus allowing for a thorough study of the BG material. The BM's materials are stone sculptures, terracotta plaques, seals, stupas and a series of small offerings (which include gemstones and coins); this collection is archaeological in its focus. The museum also holds the photographs, notebooks and other documents belonging to Cunningham. On the other hand, the V&A's collection is centred round architectural remains and stone sculptures. They also possess a wide variety of stūpas and a Gupta era doorway. However, the great majority of the sculptures from the Mahābodhi are in India. Some are held in the Indian museums, mainly the local one at BG and the Indian Museum of Kolkata, while others are kept under worship in or by the temple in Bihār. The British intervention at the site - both the excavation and restoration works-, led to material being sold or brought to England.¹⁸² Nevertheless, the British also re-enshrined pieces in the site and re-assembled sculptures; this is especially true in the case of votive stūpas that were lying in fragments. In this chapter, I will analyse pieces from the London museums, look into pictures of sculptures taken in the 19th century (held in the BM and the BL) and discuss materials still in BG.

In addition to their sacred function, images play an important role providing scholars with insights into India's history. There are few inscriptions and literature presents the problem of subsequent insertions, but sculptural imagery is a tangible product of its time. Sculptures can be used to draw inferences, not only about art, but about a full range of human thought and

¹⁸² See Chapter 1.

activity, including history and geography.¹⁸³ BG is a particularly interesting place in this regard; its long history solidifies the Mahābodhi's art among the most important of India.¹⁸⁴

A chronological Survey of Indian Art found at BG, as illustrated by the collections in the BM, V&A and the BL

Mauryan Art: vajrāsana

Under Aśoka's rule it is said that the arts were favoured. Painters, carpenters and potters occupied entire towns in Magadha. The arts of glass-making and cutting of stones continued to flourish; the art of printing in cotton was practiced; and fine materials such as cotton, wool, linen and silk were woven. Stone became popular during Aśoka's time, making an appearance in architecture and for sculpture in relief and in the round.¹⁸⁵

The special and widespread characteristic of the art of Aśoka's time is the fine finish and polish of the surfaces. Coomaraswamy states the following:¹⁸⁶

The official art of Aśoka's reign is mainly represented in the monolithic pillar on which the edicts are engraved. Of the numerous extant examples the finest is that of Sarnath (...). The shaft is of plain sandstone, circular in section and slightly tapering; the capital consists of four addorsed lions, which originally supported a Dhamma-cakka or Wheel of the Law, resting on an abacus bearing in relief an elephant, horse, bull and lion separated by four small dhamma-cakkas(...). As in other typical examples of Aśokan art, the cutting and the polishing of the surface are executed with extraordinary precision and accuracy; not only is great technical skill displayed in this respect, but the art itself is of an advanced and even late type with quite realistic modelling and movement. In other extant or now lost examples the crowning member consisted of similar lions, or of a single bull, horse, elephant or wheel, with the abacus variously ornamented, in one case with flying hamsas in low relief, in another with lotus and palmette motifs. All the inscriptions are finely cut.

Architectural remains of Aśoka's reign in polished sandstone are scarce. They include a rail and fragments of inscribed capitals at Sarnath, and the vajrāsana, with its four pilasters, at BG.¹⁸⁷ The Diamond Throne was found by Cunningham during the restoration works of the

¹⁸³ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. x.

¹⁸⁵ Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, p. 16

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 17-8.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

Mahābodhi. Although slightly damaged (with one corner broken off), its details were well preserved. Cunningham provides the following description and an account of when he first found the *vajrāsana*:¹⁸⁸

Accordingly right under the figure of Buddha was found, placed against the wall, a polished Vajrāsana Throne of grey sandstone, 7 feet 10 ½ inches long by 4 feet 7 ½ inches broad and 6 inches thick. The whole surface was carved with geometrical patterns, circular in the middle, with a double border of squares. All the four outer faces of the slab were richly carved with pigeons and the conventional acanthus flowers and geese of Aśoka's Pillar Capitals.' (see Figs. 4.1-4.2)

This slab now lies uncovered at the back of the Mahābodhi, under the bodhi Tree, where they both remain under worship. The *vajrāsana* has suffered since it was excavated. For instance, the figures and pilasters carved on its base have disappeared due to weather exposure. These figures appear to be of a later date than the top slab. Although difficult to observe in detail in the few photographs where they survive, their shapes are more typical of the early Gupta era. Since the *vajrāsana* was exposed in the early centuries CE, the base and figures could have been added as the temple complex grew. Studies on this are inconclusive because the pieces disintegrated. However, a recent study by Falk inclines to the view that the Diamond Throne is Aśokan and its base Gupta. He provides the following stylistic analysis of the upper slab, both of the geometrical-patterned top and the ornamented sides:¹⁸⁹

The birds and honeysuckle motif are very much akin to those on true Aśokan abaci. The combination of bird and flower is also found on the Sāñchī abacus. Regarding shape there is a small difference: all birds on abaci show a bend about midway between head and body, whereas the birds on the asana have a slightly shorter, unbent neck.

It is obvious that for the pillar capitals the artists of Aśoka combined birds only with lions, as, e.g., at Rampurva, Sāñchī and Nandangarh. The bull and elephant capitals show no birds at all. This seems to speak for a symbolism common to both the pillars and the asana: the Buddha is the lion and his words are picked up by birds, i.e. diligent human couples.

¹⁸⁸ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 19; See Chapter 5.

¹⁸⁹ Falk, *Aśokan Sites and Artefacts*, p. 286.

The flat upper side is deeply incised for inlays, all of them lost. There is no exact parallel to the patterns used at other Aśokan sites. A distant parallel is the lattice work at the entrance of the Lomas Rishi cave at Barabar.

If the asana is not of Aśokan origin it certainly cannot be very much younger.
(see figs. 4.3-4.5)

When the *vajrāsana* was discovered by Cunningham, the remains of the railing which enclosed the throne and Bodhi tree were also identified. Although close in time to the slab, they are stylistically post-Mauryan.

Post- Maurya and Pre- Sunga Period: BG Pillar

The Sunga Empire (185 to 75 BCE) was established after the fall of the Mauryan Empire. Initially the capital of the empire remained in Pataliputra, meaning the Sunga dynasty was also based in Magadha in Eastern India. Art, philosophy and education flourished during this period, which saw the creation of numerous terracotta figures, stone sculptures and architectural monuments. Famous monuments of the post-Mauryan and pre-Kuṣāṇ period are the Bharhut and Sāñchī stupas, and other gateways and railings. The railing (*vedika*) is identical in nature to the wooden fences that protected the *caityas*; it consists of a plinth (*alambana*), uprights (*thaba*) with lateral sockets for the reception of the horizontal ‘needles’ (*suci*), and a coping (*usnisa*). The famous railing at BG is reminiscent of the Bharhut style, and it dates to approximately 100 BCE.¹⁹⁰

BG became a centre of building activity from the 3rd century BCE. The site was surrounded, at an early stage, by a carved sandstone railing. This railing was later enlarged and re-erected to form a larger enclosure with the help of additional posts, this time made of granite, and provided with a gateway to the east.¹⁹¹ Portions of this railing, both the sandstone and granite parts, have survived to the present day. The granite sections are recognized as belonging to the Gupta period, circa the 5th century CE. The date of the sandstone railing, however, remains controversial, ranging from the 3rd century BCE to the 1st or 2nd century CE. Determining its chronology is extremely important because, together with Sāñchī and Bharhut, it constitutes a significant document of early Indian Buddhist sculpture.¹⁹² Chakravarty writes the following:¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, pp. 30-2

¹⁹¹ See Chapter 3.

¹⁹² K. K. Chakravarty, *Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gaya* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997), p. xv.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 32.

By looking at motifs alone, BG and Sāñchī might both appear to be closer to Bharhut than to each other. If mere simplicity in composition was taken to indicate a priority in time, the rather simple style of BG, could well be considered as antecedent to the sophistication of Bharhut. If we were tempted, on the other hand, to see the 'simpler' style of the circular panels or the smaller figures within BG itself as early, and the more 'complex' style of the rectangular panels or the larger figures as late, as was indeed done, some time ago, by Bachhofer, Coomaraswamy or Marshall, we might be ignoring the fact that the simple and complex forms have existed together in all phases of Indian sculpture, including those of the Indus Valley, the Maurya period and in major monuments like Bharhut and Sanchi. If again, an advance from the relief to the round was considered to be the dominant trend of early Indian sculpture, this impression is negated by the fact, that in the third century BCE, it is the round that is emphasized, preceding the relief sculpture that is found in such abundance in the first two centuries BCE.

The controversy of the chronology of the railing started with Cunningham. Cunningham and Beglar found a number of sandstone pillars, one *in situ* and others scattered about the site of the Mahābodhi, and concluded that the pieces once formed part of the Aśokan railing. However, as Chakravarty notes, Cunningham did not provide proper documentation for this claim:¹⁹⁴

Convinced that he had found the remains of the Aśokan railing, Cunningham wrote his magnum opus on Bodh-Gaya (1892), consolidating his research over three decades. Instead of allowing archaeology, however imperfect, to determine his chronology, he relied on a tendentious reading of the inscriptions and Hiouen Tsang's account, to force all the sandstone sculptures into the Aśokan period.

In *Mahābodhi*, Cunningham gives a brief description of the discovery of what he identifies as the railing and explains where it ought to have been placed in reference to the main temple:¹⁹⁵

The only other remains of Aśoka's time consist of the Pillars, Rail Bars, and Copings of the Colonnade or Railing, which once enclosed the Vajrāsana Temple. According to Hwen Thsang, Aśoka surrounded the holy pipal tree with a stone

¹⁹⁴ Chakravarty, *Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gaya*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁵ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, pp. 11-2.

wall 10 feet high. (...) The railing was nearly as possible as 250 feet, which agrees exactly with the number of 100 paces or 250 feet given by Hwen Thsang, if his measurement refers to the Temple of Aśoka.

The Pillars of the present Railing are proved to have belonged to the original Railing by their inscriptions in Aśoka characters, which are also found on the Rail Bars and Copings. (...) Hwen Thsang describes the Railing which he saw as about 10 feet in height, which agrees with the dimensions of the present Railing, the Coping being 1 foot 2 inches, the Pillars 6 feet 8 inches, and plinth 2 feet 2 inches, or altogether 9 feet 10 inches in height.(...) That the inscribed portions of this Railing belonged to the original enclosure of Aśoka is quite certain, as the Aśoka inscriptions still remain on them distinct and legible.

Cunningham's inclination to assign these sandstone pillars to the Aśokan times, based on inscriptions and early medieval pilgrim accounts, are inconclusive. His information is limited and the overall attribution seems an assumption driven by the desire to locate the remains of the Mauryan shrine.¹⁹⁶

(...)It can thus be seen that Cunningham's consideration of Bodh-Gaya railing has little to recommend to it, both the archaeology and the description being quite wanting and hardly helpful except for having yielded the fragmentary shards of evidence about the findspots of a few controversial sandstone sculptures.

The pointlessness of associating the standing sandstone pillars with their recent location around the Mahābodhi temple becomes quite evident. (...) It is clear, therefore, that archaeology cannot, having been pursued by rudimentary methods, fitfully, and without proper documentation, help us resolve the controversy of the chronology of the sandstone railing sculptures.

Cunningham's claims ought to be critically analysed but not all of his conclusions need to be discarded. Although the specific location of the railing cannot be confirmed, the claim that it surrounded the *vajrāsana* and the bodhi tree is accurate.

The railing cannot be assigned to the Mauryan period in particular, but rather to the post-Mauryan and pre-Sunga era . This was determined by the inscriptions it bears and the artistic style of the pieces. The latter topic has been extensively developed by K.K. Chakravarty; he wrote a chapter providing an intensive stylistic analysis of the railing, published in his book

¹⁹⁶ Chakravarty, *Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gaya*, pp. 6-7.

Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gaya.¹⁹⁷ Chakravarty dates the railing as being from the 1st century BCE.

Based on stylistic analyses, focused predominantly on the pillar kept in the V&A Museum, the dating for the railing is given as ranging from the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE; this being the accepted scholarly opinion. The pillar in the V&A (IS.1065-1883) corroborates this dating as it has an inscription that links it to the Mitra dynasty. Therefore, the agreed conclusion is that the style is simple, but not early, as the BG railing did not precede the ones in Bharhut.

Cunningham gives a description of the style of the pieces composing the railing in *Mahābodhi*. It is important to note that the railing Cunningham describes comprised both the early sandstone elements and the granite Gupta ones:¹⁹⁸

The inner faces of the architraves or coping stones are ornamented with long strings of animals, some natural, but others quite fabulous. There are Elephants and Lions, Bulls and Deer, Goats and Sheep, mingled with Winged Horses and Fishtailed Elephants, Lions, and Rams. (...) The Pillars are decorated after the usual fashion of early Buddhist Railings. On each face at top and bottom there are semi-circular medallions, containing half flowers, or small scenes of various kinds. In the middle of each face there is a full circular medallion, which is ornamented in the same manner as the semi-circular medallions. On the outer faces of several of these pillars there is a short inscription in Aśoka characters, giving the name of the pious donor.

The V&A pillar (IS.1065-1883), an element of the original railing, helps illustrate Cunningham's stylistic description (see figs. 4.6-4.7). It was presented to the V&A by Surgeon-Major F.A. Turton. The surviving section of the pillar is made of sandstone, measures 116 cm (height) x 37 cm (width), and is currently on display in the Museum. This piece, the upper part of the pillar, is decorated on two faces with roundels. The upper roundels depict devotees worshipping the sacred bodhi tree and a scene of a princely figure receiving a hunter with a bird on a pole (see fig. 4.8). This is probably a scene from the Hamsa Jātaka story, which recounts the Buddha's previous existence as a goose who offered his life for another. There is an inscription on each face: one is a short dedicatory inscription in Brāhmī characters of the Aśoka type; the other consisting only of the word Vallabhasya, in medieval nagari characters. The Brāhmī inscription records the pillar as 'the gift of the noble lady

¹⁹⁷ Chakravarty, *Early Buddhist Art of Bodh-Gaya*, pp. 31-56.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid; see also Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, pp. 151-2.

Kurangi'.¹⁹⁹ Cunningham's reading of *Ayaye Kurangiye danam* (or 'gift of the noble lady Kurangi') reveals that Kurangi is a female name, meaning 'fawn-eyed', or with eyes like Kurangi Deer. One of the Jātakas is named '*Kurangi-Miga-Jataka*' after the deer.²⁰⁰

The railing is the latest surviving example of the post-Mauryan period at BG and its importance in the art history of the site is undeniable. Both the *vajrāsana* and the inscribed sandstone illustrate the nature of the artistic activities in BG in the last centuries BCE and the 1st century CE. Interestingly, no material from the site can be dated to the following centuries. It appears BG's art production stalled for a period of time, flourishing again during the Gupta era

The Development of the Buddha Image and the Dry Era at BG, from the Sunga and Kuṣāṇ periods to the Early Gupta era: Coin of Huvishka and Buddha in the Kolkata Museum

No sculptural examples have survived from BG dating to the *Sunga* and *Kuṣāṇ* era. Only some numismatic material evidence of the period has been found, the main example being a Huvishka coin found inside the *vajrāsana*. This piece, part of the BM's Cunningham Collection (1882,1103.14; see Fig. 4.9), dates to the 2nd century CE and was made into a pendant.²⁰¹ The BM's Registrar recorded the following description:

Gold pendant formed of two thin plates impressed with the obverse of a coin of *Huvishka*, joined at the edges and enclosing a metallic substance (circa 120-160 AD).

Whether this coin impression was deposited in BG during the *Kuṣāṇ* period or later remains unknown. What can be confirmed is that the coins used for the impression were current in the *Kuṣāṇ* Empire. When they arrived at BG has not been recorded and it is likely that they were deposited long after their production in the Gupta era. Therefore, the *Huvishka* coins and other numismatic material collected by Cunningham at BG cannot be considered as a strong indication of significant activity in this site during the *Kuṣāṇ* times. Much to the contrary, BG seems to have gone through a 'dry period'. The fact that there are no surviving *Kuṣāṇ* sculptural remains indicates that BG, left outside the boundaries of the Empire, was not then regarded as a key religious centre nor established as a main pilgrimage site. During the 1st to 4th centuries, BG must have simply been a shrine comprising the railing and the holy enclosure, with the *vajrāsana* and the bodhi tree.

¹⁹⁹ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O25018/pillar-unknown/>

²⁰⁰ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 15.

²⁰¹ W. Zwalf, *Buddhism: Art and Faith* (London: British Museum Publications, 1985).

While BG remained somewhat outside the map, a crucial development for Buddhist art occurred: the Buddha begins to appear in sculptures in human form. Taxila and Mathura were having a direct impact on the creation of Buddhist art, generating the first examples that depicted the anthropomorphic version of the Buddha, and establishing an iconography. Although Gandharan art was strongly influential, it was the art of Mathura (which contained Gandharan influence itself, as well as characteristics from pre-Kuṣāṇ Yakṣa art), that had a stronger impact on Bihār. Thus is due to the geographical proximity of Mathura, in modern-day Uttar Pradesh, and Bihār. Coomaraswamy characterises the art of Mathura as follows:²⁰²

The early Kusana Buddha and Bodhisattva type of Mathura is characterised by the following peculiarities: the sculpture is in the round, or very high relief, and always in the mottled red sandstone of Sikri or Rup Bas; the head is shaven, never covered with curls; the usnisa, wherever preserved, is spiral; there is no urna and no moustache; the right hand is raised in abhaya mudra, the left is often clenched, and rests on the thigh in seated figures, or in standing figures supports the folds of the robe, the elbow being always at some distance from the body; the breasts are curiously prominent, though the type is absolutely masculine, and the shoulders very broad; the robe leaves the right shoulder bare; the drapery moulds the flesh very closely, and is arranged in schematic folds; the seat is never a lotus, but always a lion throne (simhasana) without miniature figures, while in the case of standing figures there is often a seated lion between the feet; the gesture and features are expressive of enormous energy, rather than of repose or sweetness, nor is there any suggestion of intended grace. The nimbus is plain or scalloped at the edge in low relief.

Mathura was responsible for the creation of influential Buddha figures, while sites such as Sarnath helped with the spreading and establishment of the Buddha sculptures.

Coomaraswamy states:²⁰³

It is evident (...), that a type of Buddha image had been created at Mathura independently of any Hellenistic prototype; and that this Mathura type was transported to many other sacred sites, for at the very beginning of Kaniska's reign we find Mathura "sending down images to the sacred sites of the Gangetic plains, thus setting examples to the sculptures of Benares and Gaya".

²⁰² Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, pp. 56-7.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, pp. 59-60.

This relationship between the production centre of the art (Mathura) and the sites that subsequently helped popularise the Buddha image, can be illustrated through carefully studying the history of the colossal Bodhisattva in the Sarnath Museum (see Figs. 4.10-4.11). The arrival of this piece to Sarnath impacted the region. Created in the 1st century in Mathura, the standing Bodhisattva (250x105x34 cms) was brought to Sarnath shortly after. It was dedicated by Friar Bala in the 3rd year of Kanishka (123 CE), together with a richly carved umbrella. The Bodhisattva has a lion between the feet, and traces of original colouring.²⁰⁴ It is made of red sandstone from Mathura and bears a donative description.²⁰⁵

As part of the process of introduction of the Buddha figures in Eastern India, it was necessary to bring in a piece from Mathura, and this is the reason why the Sarnath Bodhisattva was transported through the Kuṣān Empire until it reached its destination by the Deer Park, just a few kilometres outside of Benares. The arrival of the Bodhisattva did not go un-noticed and it went on to heavily influence the local art production. This sculpture Bodhisattva became the model for the sculptures of Sarnath. Although BG did not feel the direct impact of the Sarnath piece, the figure led to the creation of numerous Buddhas in Bihār.

By the time the Buddha image reached BG it was well-established and it made sense to add a seated Buddha. That Buddha, from the 4th century CE (late Kuṣān in style but made in the early Gupta era) was found by Cunningham while working on the Mahābodhi temple precincts in the 19th century (see Fig. 4.12).

Now in the Indian Museum of Kolkata (Acc. No. A25023, measurements 47"x37 ½"), this piece has been subject to debate when it comes to its dating. Cunningham dates it to the Kuṣān era, since it is Kuṣān in style, but Fleet and Asher assign it to the early Gupta era.²⁰⁶ The latter is the widely accepted opinion on the matter. In fact, certain characteristics of the BG Buddha, like its facial features, indicate an early Gupta style. In *Mahābodhi* Cunningham explains his claims on the date of the piece.²⁰⁷

The next in age (to the Buddhist Railing) is the colossal statue of Buddha, which was set up during the time of Maharaja Tukamala, while the Indo-Scythians still held sway in Northern India. It is dated in the Samvat year 64, or, according to my calculations, A.D. 152, in the reign of the great King Huvishka. If referred to the Saka era, the date will be A.D. 142.

²⁰⁴ Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, p.58.

²⁰⁵ <http://www.sarnathmuseumasi.org/Gallery3%20Acc%20No%20356.aspx>

²⁰⁶ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*.

²⁰⁷ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 54.

Cunningham's dating of the Buddha is not incorrect; his dating of the Gupta era, however, is. As Robert Bracey, a numismatics specialist from the BM, has stated, Cunningham established his chronology of the Kuṣān and Gupta periods through the study of his coin collections.²⁰⁸ He followed a sequence derived from numismatic analyses which led to him thinking the Guptas were earlier than they were, thus he dated the Buddha as Kuṣān. Furthermore, the Gupta era was not fixed when Cunningham made his claims. It was not until Fleet published his *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings* in the late 19th century that the Gupta time period was assigned. In his lengthy introduction to the book, Fleet showed calendric evidence that confirmed the beginning of the Gupta era in circa 320 CE. The 64 on the inscription on the Buddha at BG therefore corresponds to the Gupta calendar. One must add 64 to the year 320 to date the piece as 384 CE. It is an early Gupta piece, most likely made during the rule of Chandragupta II, characterised by a heavy Kuṣān style. Asher gives a lengthy discussion on the date and style of the BG Buddha in *Art of Eastern India*:²⁰⁹

The seated Buddha image, found near a small ruined temple about 20 feet south of the railing enclosing the Mahābodhi temple at Bodhgaya, in every way stands apart from the other fourth-century works from Eastern India. It is usually considered to be an early Gupta work imported from Mathura. The early Gupta date can be easily supported, but the figure was probably made locally, in a style that anticipates subsequent developments of the Magadha style; it was not imported from Mathura as traditionally thought. The Mathura features, actually based on the early Kusana style, may be the result of a migration of artists to this sacred site or else inspiration derived from Mathura works actually imported to Bodhgaya. In any event, as this was a monastic site, artists likely were maintained here, preserving a style long after it went out of fashion elsewhere.

The figure, slightly larger than life size, is seated in vajraparyankasana, with the left hand, now broken, placed on the left knee and the right hand, also broken, raised in abhaya mudra. The outer garment covers the left shoulder only, leaving the right shoulder bare. The figure is massive in its proportions, with a full belly and expansive chest, and a large, heavy head. The modelling is soft, giving the impression of a pliable flesh. The head is bent slightly downward, and the eyes are fully downcast in the Gupta manner, suggesting the contemplative nature of the figure, by contrast to the open eyes of earlier images.

²⁰⁸ Reference to his paper, presented during the Bodh Gaya Study Day at BM.

²⁰⁹ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*, p. 19.

The three-line inscription on the base of the sculpture is difficult to read in full (...). However, the essential meaning is clear: It records the dedication of a Bodhisattva by one Siddhārtha on the fifth day of the third month of the year 64 during the reign of the otherwise unknown Maharaja Trikamala. (...) Although no paramount Gupta sovereign is named in the inscription, the year 64 should be assigned to the Gupta era (...), thus the image must have been made in 383/84 AD.

Harle reinforces the claim that the BG Buddha dates to the time of the early Guptas stating that the Buddha is iconographically and stylistically related to the Mathura Buddhas of the Kuṣāṇ period, but with a head having the contemplative face achieved in the Gupta period. This confirms that the piece was made in Eastern India, where the influence of the Kuṣāṇ style remained into the 5th century CE.²¹⁰ In fact, the Buddha is from Bihār since it is made of red stone and not of the Sikri sandstone characteristic of Mathura art. The stone used for the Buddha occurs naturally in nearby areas to BG, such as Sarnath.²¹¹

The inscription on the BG Buddha indicates that the colossal piece was made at the time when the Maharaja Trikamala was ruling over the area. This is a further indication that the sculpture is Gupta since he governed a small kingdom that was subordinate to the Guptas.

The Buddha occupies a unique position as the sole surviving work from one of the pivotal periods in the history of Indian sculpture, that of the change from the early naturalism (which reached its full maturity at Sāñchī in some of the western caves and in Kuṣāṇ Mathura), to the idealism of the Gupta period, with its tendency to abstraction.²¹²

The BG Buddha indicates the development of a local Gupta style, less dependent of the Mathura prototypes.²¹³ This is illustrated in the numerous sculptures created in the following centuries, a time that also saw BG welcoming numerous pilgrims from across Asia. It was then that BG was established as a key pilgrimage site. This therefore led to its art and architecture flourishing.²¹⁴

Gupta Period: BG Pillars; Doorway; Mahānāman Inscription; Radiant Buddha

In the 5th century CE the art of Bihār started to be made locally, thus acquiring its own style. This resulted in the art of sites such as BG, Sarnath and Nālandā sharing overarching similar

²¹⁰ Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 16.

²¹¹ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*, p. 20.

²¹² Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 16.

²¹³ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*, p. 21.

²¹⁴ See Chapters 2 and 3.

characteristics. Asher claims there were two main sculpture-producing centres in Bihār during the Gupta era: Rajgir and Gaya.²¹⁵ The pieces made in Gaya are mainly associated with BG, specifically with the Mahābodhi temple, where they were enshrined.

BG Pillar. The Mahābodhi was initially a simple enclosure demarcated by the Aśokan sandstone pillars. However, this shrine was expanded on numerous occasions and underwent its biggest transformation during the 6th century CE, when the first Mahābodhi temple was erected.²¹⁶ There was a change in orientation, from an open-roof enclosure, to a temple.²¹⁷ This transformation materialised in a number of alterations to the site, among which was the addition of Gupta sculptures. Gupta art went on to complement earlier pieces, with both examples coexisting in the precincts of the temple and on the Mahābodhi itself.

The enclosure of the *vajrāsana* was expanded during the Gupta times and granite pillars were added to the sandstone ones. These pillars, although aiming to imitate the post-Mauryan ones, carry a strong Gupta style:²¹⁸

At the time of this modification (referring to the shift from the open shrine to the enclosed temple), the old sandstone railing that enclosed the temple precinct, probably datable to the first century B.C., was enlarged considerably by the addition of granite uprights to enclose a much larger space. Some attempt was made to ensure that the Gupta additions would conform to the basic pattern of the much earlier uprights that they supplemented; moreover, no contemporary model existed, since such stone railings had gone out of fashion by the second century. Three-quarter medallions with floral or figural motifs decorate the top and bottom of each upright, and a face of distinctive Gupta style adorns the central medallion of most of the granite posts. Because of the abraded condition of the posts and the granite, which is pocked to begin with, it is difficult to form sound judgements on the basis of style about the date of these Gupta uprights. But the faces reveal much of the Gupta softness and delicacy that persisted at least as late as the middle sixth century... (See Figs. 4.13-4.14).

Another intervention related to the *vajrāsana* was the addition of Gupta stucco pieces to the base of the Mauryan slab.²¹⁹ At each end the stucco figures were confined to four panels, two recessed, each with a lion, and two projecting, and each with a pot-bellied dwarf. The faces

²¹⁵ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*.

²¹⁶ See Chapter 3

²¹⁷ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*, p. 27.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ See Fig. 4.2.

of the dwarfs are close enough in style to the faces of some of the granite railing posts at the site to suggest that this stucco work was added when the railing was enlarged.²²⁰

Doorway. Numerous architectural interventions transformed the site of the Mahābodhi. Not only was the temple erected and the railing surrounding it expanded and supplemented, but other characteristically Gupta pieces were also incorporated to the complex. An example of these Gupta additions were the doorways constructed at BG. In Agrawala's *Gupta Temple Architecture*, these doorframes are described as follows:²²¹

The stone doorframes of the Gupta temples show some distinct features typical of the style. The doorway served as the best decorated portion of the monument in which utmost care was taken in employing decorative symbols and motifs, both for beauty and auspiciousness. As V.S. Agrawala puts it "Indeed with the emergence of the flat-roofed small shrines in the early Gupta period (4th century A.D.) the framework of the entrance to the temple received special attention and various elements of decoration were introduced to impart beauty, grace and life to the architectural portion leading to the identity of the shrine. No doubt, the various elements of decoration of the doorways of Gupta temples, namely, the projecting image in the centre of the lintel (dvara-lalata-bimba), attendant figures (pratihari) occupying the lower one-fourth portion of the jamb, auspicious birds on wing (mangalya vihaga), usually flying geese, auspicious tree (Srivriksha), stylised Svastika, Full Vase (purna-kalasa), amorous couples (mithunas), foliated scrolls (patralata), rosettes (phullavali), dwarfish figures (pramathas) (...), have invested these architectural specimens with exquisite richness and delightful form, seldom equalled by anything else in Indian art.

Some examples of Gupta doorways are standing in the Mahābodhi site, while others are kept in Indian and British museums. The Indian Museum in Kolkata holds a few examples, the main of which was described and illustrated by Mitra in *Buddha Gaya* (see Fig. 4.15).²²² This doorway was found by Beglar during the initial excavations of the Mahābodhi. A picture taken during the works in the late 19th century CE shows one of the vertical components of the door *in situ*, piled together with other sculptures (see Fig. 4.16). The Gupta doorway is recorded as having been given to the Asiatic Society of Bengal by the Government of Bengal

²²⁰ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*, p. 27.

²²¹ Agrawala, *Gupta Temple Architecture*, pp.65-6.

²²² Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, p. 142.

on the 27th of March of 1879. It was in the Indian Museum by 1883, where it was labelled as B.G. 88 and 89, and published in the museum's catalogue under the following description:²²³

B.G.88—The lintel of a doorway, measuring 4' 5" broad. It has been described and figured by Dr. Mitra (...)

B.G.89 (a) & (b)—Two door posts, each 4'11".25 in height, one of them, 89b, probably belonging to the lintel B.G.88. They were both discovered by Mr Beglar in 1879-82. Near the lower end of b, a male human figure is kneeling with a five-headed snake as a hood, and with an offering in its hands, while on a, the corresponding figure is a woman. In b, the innermost line of ornamentation ends above the Naga in a large human head or kirttimukha, and over which there is a vidyadhara on a floral device, while in a, the corresponding ornament ends in a pendant Naga. In b, the outer ornamentation stops short about half-way up (...). The base of this stone is inscribed in the Gupta characters. Each of these jambs has been cut out of a pillar of an old Buddhist railing (...), as each still retains two of the mortises for the cross-bars.

A close study of the history of the Indian Museum doorway helps shed light on another similar Gupta doorframe that belongs to the V&A and is stored in Dean Hill Park, the Museum's off-site facility. The piece (V&A: IS.691 to 6 -1883) (See Fig. 4.17) was labelled in the registrar as being either from Mathura or BG. Its style corresponds with both the Kolkata piece and the doorway located on the east side of the Mahābodhi, meaning it is a Gupta piece from Bihār, not Mathura. No further information is provided in the V&A records, but the museum number it carries indicates that it was acquired by Caspar Purdon Clarke in the early 1880s. It was at that time that he went on a year-long trip to India to buy pieces that would supplement the collection in London, regarded as having some deficiencies.²²⁴

Similarly to the BG sculptures he acquired, this doorway must have been found by Beglar during the excavation works at the site, and sold or gifted to Purdon Clarke. It has since remained in storage and un-photographed until now. Further research is required on the V&A doorway.

Mahānāman Inscription. Epigraphic evidence from BG, in addition to the architectural additions, also confirms the 6th century as the date of the Mahābodhi's expansion. Inscriptions from the Gupta era evidence the architectural growth of the site and the overall

²²³ Anderson, *Catalogue and Hand-Book of the Archaeological Collections in the Indian Museum* (Calcutta: Indian Museum, 1883), pp. 50-1.

²²⁴ See Chapter 1.

development surrounding the temple complex. These inscriptions indicate a spate of activity at BG during the late 6th century CE, following a period of relative inactivity at the site.²²⁵

The most important of the BG inscriptions provides insights into the function of the temples. It is a long stone tablet inscription of the Sri Lankan monk Mahānāman. Its current location is unknown, but a rubbing of it was taken by Cunningham and later given to the BM in 1892 (BM: 1892,1103.199).²²⁶ In recent years, there has been much debate about the temple mentioned on it, and the date.²²⁷ Nevertheless, the importance of the rubbing of the Mahānāman inscription is that it sheds light into the activities taking place at BG during the 6th century CE. Although further research on this piece would be sure to provide interesting results, especially in terms of the connection between the Sri Lankans and BG, for the present study what matters is that it confirms the building activities at the site. BG was a growing temple complex during that time, with many sculptures incorporated and stūpas erected.

Radiant Buddha. The main characteristic of the art of India during the Gupta times is its classical quality. In the Kuṣān period the cult image is still a new and important conception, but in the Gupta period the image has taken its place in architecture. It becomes necessary and enters the general decorative scheme, and in its integration acquires delicacy and repose. At the same time, technique is perfected and it becomes the medium of conscious and explicit statement of spiritual conceptions, evidenced in the arts. Iconographic types and compositions, still variable in the Kuṣān period, are now standardised in forms whose influence extends far beyond the Ganges valley.²²⁸

The Buddha image in the early Gupta period is fully evolved, and this classical type is the main source of all later forms both in and beyond the Indian boundaries. The Gupta type is characterised by a clear delineation and definition of the features, by curly hair, absence of urn, greater variety of mudras, elaborately decorated nimbus, the robe covering one or both shoulders, and by a lotus or lion pedestal, usually with figures of donors.²²⁹

Gupta sculpture in stone consists of a small but important number of rock-carvings in Central and Eastern India, and a number of individual images (both Hindu and Buddhist), originally installed in shrines or placed in niches, although surviving examples can only be a small

²²⁵ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*, p. 28.

²²⁶ See Fig. 3.6.

²²⁷ See Chapter 3.

²²⁸ Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, p. 71-2.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 74.

fraction of the total production.²³⁰ Some rare examples were made of metal, a surviving one of which is now co-owned by the British and V&A Museums (BM: 2004,0401.1/V&A:IS.3-2004) (see Figs. 4.18-4.20). Known as the Radiant Buddha, this sculpture was made in the late 6th or early 7th century CE, meaning it is a late Gupta piece. Currently on display in the V&A, the Radiant Buddha is an exceptional early metal image of the Buddha, made of a copper alloy, probably the product of monastic workshops in Bihār.

The Radiant Buddha is a sculpture of Śakyamuni, the historical Buddha, where he is represented with his hand raised in abhaya mudra, the gesture of allaying fear, underscoring his role as a spiritual protector. The downward cast of the eyes and head are a reminder that the image of the Buddha, no matter what the scale, should be viewed from a lower position.²³¹ The piece features a finely carved head with stylized curls and delicate features; the robes are folded and drawn across both shoulders and 'wet drapery' defines the bodily form beneath; it has a raised right hand with outward palm (index finger missing), the left hand lowered and holding the end of his robe; the piece also displays a number of the supernatural marks of Buddhahood, including skull protuberance and webbed fingers. The Radiant Buddha was probably a processional item.²³²

The Radiant Buddha represents the culmination of the development of early Buddhist imagery, since the Gupta period is credited with creating this quintessential Buddha-type, which spread and was copied throughout the Asian Buddhist world, including in Pāla Eastern India.²³³

Pāla era: Buddha; Stūpas; Plaques; Reliefs; Mahābodhi Models. The bridge to Pāla art takes place between 700-800 CE, a time when the formalized outcome of post-Gupta developments coexists with the refined new style associated with the early Pāla period. Again an analogy may be drawn with early Gupta times, when one style reflecting the culmination of late Kuṣāṇ formalization gave way to the elegant new Gupta style. The old style persisted for a period while the new one gained acceptance; that was just the case at the threshold of Pāla times.²³⁴

In the lower Ganges valley the kings of the Pāla dynasty ruled for four and a half centuries, from about 730 to 1179 CE, fostering the later Buddhist art of Bihār. From 1070 onwards the

²³⁰ Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, p. 7.

²³¹ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O98160/sculpture-unknown/>

²³² http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1419273&partId=1&museumno=2004,0401.1&page=1

²³³ http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1419273&partId=1&museumno=2004,0401.1&page=1

²³⁴ Asher, *Art of Eastern India*, p. 70.

Sena dynasty dispossessed the Pālas of part of their dominions; both of them losing power to the Muslims at the end of the 12th century CE.

The development of the Pāla School of architecture and sculpture is typically illustrated at Nālandā. It was the richest source of well-known smooth black slate images of the Pāla School, and also yielded an extensive series of Buddhist bronzes. Nālandā was the capital of Buddhist culture and a key source of iconographic and stylistic influences which spread across the Buddhist east. However, Pāla sculptures are not only found in Nālandā, but elsewhere in ancient Magadha as well. Another important site where Pāla style art flourished was BG.

On the Pāla art of BG, Cunningham writes the following:²³⁵

The great mass of the sculptures belongs to the period of the Pāla kings, (...) who reigned down to the Muhammadan conquest in A.D.1201. In the sculptures of this period, of which I have seen many dated specimens, there are numberless figures of the Buddha Sakyamuni sitting under the Bodhi Tree. This figure is generally known as Vajrāsana Buddha. (...) The figures of Avalokiteswara are also very numerous.

By the Pāla era, BG had consolidated its status as a Buddhist site, at the centre of a trans-national Buddhist pilgrimage network. This resulted in a tremendous amount of Buddhist pieces being offered and enshrined in the Mahābodhi complex. Most of the sculptures from BG, both in the London Museums and at the site, date to this historical period and have a characteristic Pāla style. This group of sculptures is a varied one, comprising Buddha figures; stupas of all sizes; plaques and other votive offerings; reliefs; and models of the Mahābodhi temple, among others.

Standing Buddha. One example of the Buddha figures found in BG, seen by Buchanan-Hamilton and described by Mitra in *Buddha Gaya*, is now held in the BM and bears the number 1872,0701.30 (see Figs. 4.21-4.22). It was found by Buchanan-Hamilton in the cemetery at BG.²³⁶ Dated to the 11th-12th century CE, this piece was purchased by John Bridge in June of 1830 (at the Christie's sale of James Stuart's collection) and given to the BM in 1872; it is part of the Bridge Collection.²³⁷

²³⁵ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 55.

²³⁶ Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, p. 135.

²³⁷ See Chapter 1.

This sculpture has a large standing figure of the Buddha (1.95 m high), crowned and holding one hand in varadamudrā; surrounded by eight scenes of his life; a bowing devotee on the lower left; and bearing an inscription. The Buddha has been carved in dense grey schist and has been subsequently blackened. Zwalf wrote a detailed description of the Pāla piece:²³⁸

(In the piece) The Buddha stands at the centre. His right hand is in the gesture of charity (varadamudra), while his left holds the edge of the robes that cover his whole body. Smaller bodhisattvas stand on either side of the Buddha. Around him figures represent events from the Buddha's life. At the top right is the First Sermon, with the seated Buddha making the teaching gesture (dharmachakramudra). Two small deer beneath him indicate the location in the deer park at Sarnath. At the top the Buddha lies down at the moment of his death and final release (parinirvana). Beside the Buddha's left shoulder is the temptation by Mara and his defeat by the Buddha seated beneath a tree and a parasol.

The Buddha is here crowned and ornamented with earrings and a necklace. Crowned Buddhas were popular in eastern India from the tenth century. They are a reminder of his early life as a prince, but more importantly emphasize the Buddha's role as a universal sovereign. Crowned Buddhas also appear in the art of regions influenced by eastern India, such as Burma.

At the base of this relief is a small image of a prostrate donor figure. A damaged inscription names a donor 'desirous of release from the ocean of existence.

The Standing Buddha also bears an inscription in Sanskrit (written in early Nāgarī script), above the Buddha's right shoulder. It reads as follows:²³⁹

*ye dharmā hetu prabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teṣāṃ ca yo
nirrodha evaṃ vādī mahāśramaṇaḥ.*

*(Whatever condition springs from causes, the Tathāgata has explained their
cause and their confinement also. So is the teaching of the great Śramaṇa).*

Buddha images, where he is depicted both standing and seated, were abundant in BG during the Pāla era. However popular these sculptures were, they were only a fraction of the whole mass of pieces which existed at the site.

²³⁸ Zwalf, *Buddhism: Art and Faith*.

²³⁹ Zwalf, *Buddhism: Art and Faith*, p. 112. See also: Cifuentes "Excavating the Collections at the British Museum: Votive Offerings from Bodh Gayā" (Forthcoming 2014).

Stūpas. The stūpa is the key architectural form of Buddhism. At a mundane level, the stūpa was a place for the deposition and preservation of the cremated residue of the Buddha's body (*rūpakāya*). The building of stūpas for this purpose went hand-in-hand with the early spread of Buddhism, and lay followers gained religious merit if they supported their construction and contributed to the monastic communities responsible for maintaining them. In many examples, the stūpa is inscribed with the *Hymn of Dependent Origination*; believed to be capable of replacing the Buddha's relics and, in some ways, regarded as more effective and powerful.²⁴⁰

Votive stūpas were more numerous than Buddha images at BG. This is a reflection of the flow of pilgrims to the site of the Enlightenment during the time the Pāla kings were in power. As Cunningham explains:²⁴¹

When Buddhist pilgrims visited any of the famous sites connected with the history of their great teacher it was their invariable custom to make some offering, no matter how small or poor, to the shrine, and at the same time to set up some memorial of their visit. The offerings consisted of money and precious stones, vessels and costly cloths by the rich, and of fruits and flowers by the poor. The memorials generally took the form of temples and large Stupas by the wealthy, and of small stupas, or inscribed slabs by the poor.

Mitra, Kittoe and Cunningham all commented on the countless stupas which they found in BG and other important sites of Bihār. In BG, Cunningham mentions a few structural ones made in stones and bricks, followed in number by thousands of examples of the monolith stupa type (mostly about 2 feet high). However, the most numerous type (hundreds of thousands in number), were the small clay stupas. These, both baked and unbaked, measured 2-3 inches in height. Often, hundreds of these were found inside larger stupas.²⁴²

One example of these stupas was donated to the BM by Alexander Cunningham in 1887 (BM: 1887,0717.90) (see Fig. 4.23). It is a miniature votive stupa with a high, conical finial and inward curving base, broken open to reveal a stamped inscription inside of the Buddhist Creed); made of buff-coloured terracotta.²⁴³

There is a great variety in the shapes of the votive stupas, from the low and almost bare hemisphere of the time of Aśoka to the tall ornamented spire surmounting the mediaeval

²⁴⁰ Willis, *Shanghai Exhibition Catalogue*.

²⁴¹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 46-7.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ BM 1887,0717.90

dome, with its elaborately carved basement.²⁴⁴ Cunningham gives an overview of the style of the Pāla stūpas in *Mahābodhi*.²⁴⁵

(...) During the reign of the Pāla kings in Magadha, the style of these votive Stupas was much altered, the basement being still further heightened, and the number of umbrellas increased to 9 and 11, and even to 13, with a vase full of fruits forming a finial on the top. The whole height of the stupa thus became equal to three or four diameters of the hemisphere. At the same time figures of Buddha were placed in niches on each side of the square base, while the different tiers of mouldings were separated by rows of sculptured figures. These generally consisted of lines of small niches filled with figures of Buddha or of rows of small Stupas. In some cases the donor himself is represented below, with his gifts arranged on each side of him.

Found abundantly both in BG and in the London collections, they are all fairly similar stylistically. One example of these tall mediaeval stupas described by Cunningham is piece 1880.4085 in the BM (see Fig. 4.24). It is a sandstone votive stupa in sections (it has a stepped base, rounded drum with niches, and the tall spire or finial which includes a high, conical set of umbrellas). The niches contain images of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas and scenes from the Buddha's life. In one he is born from the side of his mother, Queen Maya, and in another he is lying down at the moment of his death or parinirvana. Larger niches in the drum include seated images of the bodhisattva Padmapani and Tara. It has a height of 93.00 cm and belonged to the India Museum prior to its arrival to the BM.²⁴⁶

*Plaques.*²⁴⁷ One of the commonest votive objects was the impressed plaque, numerous examples of which were found by Cunningham in the Buddhist sites of Bihār in the late 19th century. Most date to the 10th and 11th centuries CE, and were made of two layers of shellac – on the top and bottom- sandwiching a central bulk of clay (this was determined by the Department of Conservation of the BM using Fourier Transform Infra-Red Spectroscopy). They measure approximately 6 cm in height. Most depict a Buddhist icon or site, and bear an inscription of the Buddhist Creed or Hymn of Dependent Origination. They were both pilgrim offerings (given at BG) and Buddhist souvenirs (taken back to the pilgrim's countries). For instance, many examples have been found in Burma.

²⁴⁴ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 47.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Willis, Shanghai Exhibition Catalogue.

²⁴⁷ See Cifuentes "Excavating the Collections at the British Museum: Votive Offerings from Bodh Gayā" (Forthcoming 2014).

The Hymn of Dependent Origination summed up Nāgārjuna's complex philosophical system in condensed form: "The Buddha alone has explained the qualities that spring from causes and he, the great mendicant, has also proclaimed their confinement". Thanks to multiple meanings of the word dharma – it refers to both 'qualities' and 'teachings' – emptiness was deemed not only to be the core of the Buddha's teachings, but also to characterise the Buddha's nature and Buddha relics. The Hymn of Dependent Origination was used in place of relics and regarded as more powerful. In the BM plaques, the Hymn accompanies impressions of stupas or depictions of the BG site.

Recent studies on the plaques in the Cunningham collection have revealed that a number of sets, first believed to be from BG (it so says on the Registrar), were in fact from near-by Buddhist sites such as Giriak and Kiyul. However, most sets of plaques in the BM are from - and display-, the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

An example in the BM is a set of 48 plaques (BM:1887,0717.147 a-av) (see Fig. 4.25). The dimensions of the example shown are approximately 6cm (height) x 4cm (width) x 0.5 (depth); the weight is 6 grams. The set of plaques depict the site of Bodh Gayā itself. The Buddha is shown seated with his right hand reaching down, a gesture indicating his summoning of the earth-goddess to witness his Enlightenment after his claims to liberation were challenged by Mārā. The Buddha sits in a lobed niche with the top of a temple-spire behind. This is the Mahābodhi temple. Behind the temple are the long branches of the Bodhi tree, with its characteristic heart-shaped leaves visible. The bases, drums and umbrellas of the miniature stūpas can be seen; the Buddha's facial characteristics also appear well defined. The Hymn of the Dependent Origination is inscribed in three lines below the seated Buddha.

The depiction of the plaques is not an attempt to show the moment of the Buddha's Enlightenment in the 5th century BCE but rather a representation of the Bodh Gayā temple, with its statue of the Buddha enshrined in the central chamber, as it stood in the circa 10th century CE. The Mahābodhi temple in the plaques is surrounded by a host of minor stūpas, a true depiction of the site in so far as excavations conducted in the late 19th century revealed the Mahābodhi precinct to be filled with small shrines and hundreds of votive stūpas.

Although Cunningham does not record the exact find spot, these plaques were found by him and his team at Bodh Gayā during the excavation and restoration. This set of 48 plaques was sorted typologically by Cunningham, based on the fact that they were impressed from the same mould. This can be confirmed by carefully studying the shapes of the leaves of the Bodhi tree. Since Cunningham grouped these plaques according to their type, whether they were found together or not remains unknown.

Similar to the previous set, 1887,0717.148 a-b were found at BG, although again no specific account of how they were discovered by Cunningham is available (see Fig. 4.26). These plaques, a set of two, are also made of shellac. They have been stamped with the figure of the Buddha seated in the Mahābodhi temple surrounded by small stūpas. The best-preserved example measures 4.8cm H x 4.2cm W. Interestingly, this plaque has been pierced on each side of the temple spire, suggesting it might have been hung, perhaps on a temple wall. It has an inscription in of the Hymn of Dependent Origination written in two lines under the throne of the Buddha.

Votive plaques and offerings provide key information about Buddhist religious practice, pilgrimage and the place of BG's position in the trans-national networks of the medieval Buddhist world. It is important to note that the BM collection itself, despite its historic limitations, is invaluable as the examples preserved are rare if not unique and provide key insights into the types of votive offerings used in Bihār during the Pāla period.²⁴⁸

Reliefs. Rectangular slabs, or Reliefs of the Buddha, were intended to be inserted in large stupas such as those standing around the temple of BG. Reliefs of the Buddha were popular in the Mahābodhi complex during the Pāla era. Many less in number when compared to the votive stupas and plaques, these reliefs are fine sculptures traditionally depicting the Buddha as a central figure (both standing and seated), or rows of Buddhas. Both the BM (in the Bridge Collection) and the V&A Museum, hold some important examples of reliefs from BG. For the present chapter, only pieces from the V&A will be discussed.

The first example carries the number IS.240-1950 (see Fig.4.27). It is made of carved sandstone and dates to the 10th-11th centuries CE. This panel was collected by Mr A.H. Giles in BG when he was Superintendent of Police in Gaya District (during the time when General Cunningham was making his BG excavations in the 1870s).²⁴⁹

The relief is a vertical rectangular panel consisting of six tiers of niches containing seated Buddhas in meditation surrounding a large central tri-partite cusped niche. This niche contains a seated Buddha in meditation flanked by two standing attendant figures, possibly bodhisattvas, with their right hands raised in *abhaya mudra*. The seated Buddha is crowned with a crown comprised of triangular points rising from a beaded headband. He also wears a *kantha*: a flat jewelled necklace. He is holding a bowl in his upturned hands, which may represent the bowl of *madhu* (honey) given to him by the monkey at Vaishali. Two further

²⁴⁸ Cifuentes, "Excavating the Collections at the British Museum: Votive Offerings from Bodh Gayā" (forthcoming 2014).

²⁴⁹ See Chapter 1.

smaller figures are carved in mirror image in the *tribanga* position standing on simplified lotus buds, with their inner hands raised and the outer ones holding an object. They both have *ushnishas* on top of their heads. The decoration of the spandrels is completed with two furled vegetal leaf buds curving towards the apex of the niche. The edges of the lateral sides have a bead pattern carved along them.²⁵⁰

Another important example held in the V&A collections is MISC.10-1917 (see Fig. 4.28). This is a relief of a crowned Buddha dating to the 9th-10th centuries. It is made of granulate and was collected by William Masters, who was the Sub Deputy Opium Agent in the Bihār Agency. He was stationed for some years in Gaya and collected sculptures from the Mahābodhi temple at BG. This relief, together with 3 more pieces, belonged to the Bethnal Green Museum before being transferred to the V&A.

Object MISC.10-1917 is a vertical rectangular slab (with damaged edges and corners) showing the crowned Buddha in *bhūmisparśa mudra* seated in *padmasana* pose on a pearl-edged mat resting on a double lotus throne, resting on deeply carved foliate scrolling set within a trefoil arched niche. He is shown bejewelled with his crown of triangular panels, elaborate earrings and torque-style necklace, all emphasising his aspect of universal sovereignty. He is shown with a close-fitting robe carved with concentric folds covering both shoulders, which reveals that he has already achieved Enlightenment. On either side of him are two smaller standing figures of Buddhas in monks' robes in *abhayamudra*. Above them within the niche are two further seated Buddhas in *padmasana* (meditation mode) on single lotus thrones. The top register has a row of three small-scale seated Buddhas in trefoil-arched niches resting on bulbous columns. The central one is in *bhumishparsa mudra* while the other two are shown in *padmasana*.

The main niche has faceted columns rising out of rounded pots decorated with lotus petals and fleurons within the interstices of the petals. The pillars are decorated with looped strings of pearls and jewels hanging from bands of pearls. The moulded capitals above have a half fleuron suspended from their centres to an upper plain band on the pillars. Each capital has a *hamsa* facing outwards resting on top, behind which rises a foliated scroll along the trefoil-shaped arch, at the top of which is a *kirtimukha* (face of glory). Immediately above, but below the seated Buddhas, are the mirrored halves of a *caitya* window with further scrolling leaves. The slab has remnants of the pearl beaded decoration which ran as a border up its two sides.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O64517/relief-panel-relief-panel-unknown/>

²⁵¹ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O64360/relief-panel-relief-panel-unknown/>

Another type of Relief often found in BG depicted rows of Buddhas. One example in the V&A carries the number IS.246-1950 (see Fig. 4.29). It is made of sandstone, dates to the 10th – 11th centuries CE, and measures 8 inches (H) x 18 inches (L). It was purchased –together with 10 more pieces- by the V&A from Mrs Mary Charles, who owned the collection of A.H. Giles. This relief panel has four rows of seated Buddhas in *dhyanimudra* (or gesture of meditation).²⁵²

Mahābodhi Models. Models of the Mahābodhi temple have been found in BG, India and Burma. They played a key role in the reconstruction of the Mahābodhi, being the design inspiration for the restored temple; they illustrated elements of the temple which were found in a ruinous state in the late 19th century.²⁵³ The models also provided an insight into pilgrimage activities surrounding the Mahābodhi: they indicated how, after the arrival of Islam in the 13th century and the subsequent decline of Buddhism in Bihār, the usual practice was to enshrine a model of the Mahābodhi elsewhere, thus substituting the actual trip of pilgrimage to BG.

Both the V&A and BM have Mahābodhi temple models in their collections. The one in the V&A is object number IS.21-1986 (see Fig. 4.30). It is made of schist and dates to the 12th century; the model was made in Bihār. This piece is a gem of Indian miniaturised sculpture, replicating with remarkable precision the elements of medieval Indian temple architecture. The architectural style suggests that this model post-dates the extensive renovations of the temple undertaken by Burmese donors in the late 11th century at the behest of the kings of Pagan.

Models of this kind have been found in Buddhist lands beyond India, thus confirming that they were transported to distant Buddhist lands where they served as a surrogate pilgrim site. Devotees who could not make the perilous journey to eastern India could meditate on the model and its message instead.²⁵⁴

A number of monasteries in Tibet are recorded as once having had models, in stone or wood (see Fig. 4.31), of not just the Mahābodhi temple but of the entire complex, complete with its medieval enclosure wall and four gateways as described by the Chinese pilgrims.²⁵⁵

²⁵² <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O471960/relief-panel/>

²⁵³ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p.ix.

²⁵⁴ John Guy, “The Mahābodhi Temple: Pilgrim Souvenirs from India” in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol 133, no. 1059, June 1991, pp. 356-67.

²⁵⁵ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O64313/mahabodhi-temple-at-bodhgaya-sculpture-unknown/>

In 1957 a model Mahābodhi complex was reported as being preserved in Tibet where the temple model in the BM was initially found.²⁵⁶ It carries the number 1922,1215.7 (see Fig. 4.32). It is made of mica-schist, dates to the 12th century and has a height of 10.8 cm. The model represents the Mahābodhi temple at BG before the restoration of 1880s; the projection of the Bodhi tree is at the rear (suggesting the tree was already on the top of the platform in the Pāla era); holes at the four corners of the upper terrace secured the corner chapels; and it has a Burmese-looking arch at the foot of the spire.

The second model held in the BM belonged to Cunningham and was found by him *in situ* in the late 19th century. It is object 1892,1103.1 (see Figs. 4.33-4.34). Measuring 2.1 inches in height, this stone (mica-schist) piece of the 12th century was discussed and published by Cunningham in *Mahābodhi*.²⁵⁷

I have already mentioned the great addition that was made to the front of the Temple, as described by Hwen Thsang. But we have now acquired some further information about this work by the discovery of a small mediaeval model of the Temple in stone, of which four views are given (...), with a plan of the model placed beside an actual plan of the building for comparison. From this model we see that the holy Pipal Tree had already been placed on the top of the basement immediately behind the Temple. We see also in front an open Hall or Portico, with four Pillars in the lower storey or basement, and a lofty portico above, with a sloping arched roof. We see also the remains of some corner towers, of which traces still existed on the terrace itself in our days.

Cunningham studied this model (1892,1103.1) carefully, even deciphering its floor plan, and used his analysis as a base for his design of the restored Mahābodhi.

Conclusion

BG is one of the most important stages to have witnessed the development of Indian Buddhist art, from the time of Aśoka to the 13th century, when the religion declined. BG has a long history, from its inception as a simple Mauryan shrine to its consolidation as Buddhism's most important pilgrimage site. Its art and architecture are equally rich. Scholars have been actively researching the materials from the Mahābodhi since the end of the 19th century. The clear limitations faced then by people like Cunningham have resulted in erroneous

²⁵⁶ Zwalf, *Buddhism: Art and Faith*. See also:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=225053&partId=1&museumno=1922,1215.7&page=1

²⁵⁷ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p.25-6.

conclusions being widely accepted and a number of controversies arising around key sculptural examples. This chapter has illustrated the development of Buddhist art at BG chronologically, using examples from the Indian and London collections, with the aim of presenting new research that clarifies such misconceptions.

The prior erroneous conclusions have been carefully approached through the re-examination of pivotal pieces and other important materials from BG. Providing a chronology allows for the re-evaluation of styles and dates, and helps make clear the particular histories of key sculptural examples, such as the *vajrāsana*, the railing, the main Buddha enshrined in the Mahābodhi, and Mahānāman inscription. It also contributes to the analysis of votive offerings, so numerous during the Pāla era, thus granting insights into pilgrim practices.

This chapter has confirmed that the *vajrāsana* was a Mauryan piece, but the railing that enclosed it was post-Mauryan. It has also reinforced the hypothesis of a ‘dry period’ –in terms of art production- at BG, since no material evidence, except for some coins, has been found dating to the Sunga and Kuṣān eras. The next sculptural example to be found in the Mahābodhi complex is the Gupta Buddha, Kuṣān in style but early Gupta in date, produced in Bihār. This piece has generated controversy, but it is an early Gupta piece that reflects Mathura influences. In BG, it is a confirmation of the incorporation of the Buddha image, developed elsewhere (in sites such as Sarnath) and of the origins of a local style. This local style was later consolidated in pieces such as the Radiant Buddha, which epitomise the Buddha-type and its iconography.

Simultaneous to the development of a local Gupta art tradition was the architectural expansion of the site, which resulted in additions to the *vajrāsana* and its railing. Epigraphical evidence details the erection of temples; with the Sri Lankan inscription by Mahānāman dating to the 5th century CE being the most important example.

The votive stupas and other numerous offerings associated with the Pāla era at BG shed a light into pilgrimage practices centred round the site of the Buddha’s Enlightenment. The stupas, plaques and models of the Mahābodhi are all very important materials in so far as they indicate the nature of pilgrimage activities in BG. For instance, the abundance of stupas of all sizes indicates that the customary practice when visiting the site was to make an offering. The stupa, being the basic architectural form of Buddhism, was widely popular. It appears in BG everywhere, in examples big and small, which undoubtedly outnumber the stone sculptures and reliefs.

Votive plaques, generally small impressed terracotta pieces, functioned as offerings and as souvenirs. Many have been found in sites near BG, indicating that the normal practice was to offer them when visiting all important Buddhist sites in the region. Interestingly, many examples have been found in Burma, predominantly in Bagan. This is further confirmation of the strong links between Burma and Eastern India during the Pāla times. The Burmese, after all, are credited with the expansion of the Mahābodhi temple in the 11th century CE and with the erection of its most faithful copy in Bagan in the 14th century.

The erection of replicas of the Mahābodhi, as well as the enshrinement of models of the temple, provided pious Buddhist pilgrims with the opportunity to pay their respects to the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment after the 13th century. When the Muslims invaded Bihār, Buddhism's practice declined tremendously, and pilgrimage trips were severely obstructed, finally coming to a full stop in circa the 14th century CE. Therefore, visiting a model was the only way to travel to the Mahābodhi; the original being out of reach. These models later proved to contain crucial architectural information on the Mahābodhi temple and were used by Cunningham as a design inspiration for the restoration of the temple in BG. They also gave a glimpse into the history of the Bodhi tree, indicated as having been on the temple's platform by the Pāla era.

In conclusion, studying the sculptural materials from BG not only tells us about its artistic traditions and developments, but also about the human thought and other activities taking place there throughout time. A careful analysis of key pieces can help clarify misunderstood histories and yield new conclusions on BG's artistic heritage.

Chapter 5 –Votive Deposits and Geographical Horizons

The diamond throne was identified by Cunningham upon the removal of the back buttress of the Mahābodhi. Inside the throne was found a collection of gems, now kept in the BM. Gemmological analyses carried out in the BM by the V&A's Gemmologist Joanna Whalley, and precise identification of these items, helps shed light on geographical connections and pilgrimage networks centred on BG during the medieval period.

Historical Context

The precious stones and votive deposits that will be presented and discussed in this chapter were all found by Cunningham and his team during the excavations of the Mahābodhi temple in Bodh Gaya, during the 1880s. The majority of the archaeological material in this collection was initially classified and labelled by Cunningham himself, and has been kept for over a century in the original cases in the BM. None of the gemstones have been studied in detail since they were given to the museum, and the studies carried out therefore constitute the first thorough investigation of this body of material. Once regarded as a minor addition to the greater collection, the importance of the gemstones, jewellery and other small finds from the vajrāsana has grown with time. A detailed look into the archaeological materials can unveil numerous facts about pilgrims coming and going from BG during centuries. Their study is a vital step in understanding Buddhist pilgrimage routes surrounding the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment during the medieval times.

The precious stones, gold fragments, copper finds and jewellery pieces were found under the diamond throne. The place is referred to as the vajrāsana during the 7th century by Xuanzang.²⁵⁸ Although we do not know if Xuanzang used the term to refer to the slab or all of BG, the term '*vajrāsana*' had substituted '*bodhi-manda*' by the time of his visit.

The worship of the *vajrāsana* changed during medieval times, when the throne was covered. Although we do not know what prompted this, one possibility is that the slab, which by then was several centuries old, was decaying due to weather exposure and needed to be preserved. However, It is worth noting that covering holy objects as a means of protecting them, or to highlight their importance, is not an unusual practice in South Asia. Regardless of the reasons for the covering of the slab, the fact is that the diamond throne was hidden by the back addition to the Mahābodhi. This addition has shrines in its facades, which we can date thanks to a Nepali coin that was found with the gemstones, jewellery and other

²⁵⁸ See Chapter 2.

archaeological materials at BG. The coin and the archaeological collection therefore share the same findspot.

The Nepalese coin, collected by Cunningham and acquired by the BM in 1894 proves to be crucial for our studies of BG. It dates to circa 650 CE according to numismatic studies, and it is the only secure external indication for dating the additions to the rear of the Mahābodhi. It was left as a votive deposit at BG, logically sometime after 650 CE when it was made. We can therefore conclude that the addition to the back of the Mahābodhi can be placed between the 7th and 8th centuries. This agrees with the sculptures in niches on the facades of the additions.²⁵⁹ These were removed in their entirety as Cunningham dug down to the lowest levels at the rear of the temple.²⁶⁰

Discovery of the Archaeological Material

Cunningham began his excavation works by removing the ruinous buttresses on the western façade of the Mahābodhi. This façade contained 13 niches, 5 of which were covered by the additions, and each containing a Buddha image. Many of the images on these niches were well preserved and Gupta in style. However, the sculptures on the buttress were of a later period, indicating that this section was a later addition to the temple.

Vajrāsana

As Cunningham removed the shrines and unveiled the original facade of the Mahābodhi, he found indications of the location of the diamond throne. For instance, the central niches of the back façade contained sculptures of the Vajrāsana Buddha, with his two attendants. It was there, under the figure of the Buddha, that Cunningham discovered the *vajrāsana*. There was a blue stone, representing the throne, on the top of the pavement. It was carefully removed and the pavement taken up. As they dug further down, a second throne made of plaster was found. When this throne was removed, yet another one was discovered. This third slab made of polished sandstone and containing four pilasters in the front, older than the present temple, was the original *vajrāsana*.²⁶¹

Accordingly right under the figure of Buddha there was found, placed against the wall, a polished Vajrasana Throne of grey sandstone, 7 feet 10 ½ inches long by 4 feet 7 ½ inches broad, and 6 ¼ inches thick. The whole surface was carved with geometrical patterns, circular in the middle, with a double border of squares. All

²⁵⁹ See Chapter 4.

²⁶⁰ See Fig. 4.9.

²⁶¹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 20.

*the four outer faces of the slab were richly carved with pigeons and the conventional acanthus flowers and the geese of Asoka's Pillar Capitals. (...) As the back edge of the slab, which abutted against the wall, as also carved, it would seem that it did not occupy its original position, and I believe that it must once have formed the upper slab of the Sandstone Throne which was found inside Asoka's Temple. (...) This outer Vajrasan slab rested on a brick platform 3 feet 4 inches in height, which was ornamented by boldly moulded figures of men and lions of very early work. From the round faces, the full lips, and easy pose of the figures, with all of which features I have long been familiar in the Sarnath sculptures, I have no hesitation in assigning this pedestal to the time of the later Indo-Scythians and earlier Guptas. This date is corroborated by the characters of the inscription, which is carved on the narrow edges of the upper surface.*²⁶²

When Cunningham removed the upper slab of the *vajrāsana*, he discovered a ball of clay resting on the plastered floor. When this ball of clay was broken, it unveiled a number of relics. Most of these were gemstones and other materials. They now make up the archaeological collection from the diamond throne in the BM.

Archaeological Finds

From *Mahābodhi*:²⁶³

On removing the plaster facing the inner Vajrasan Throne there was discovered in the middle of the front face, and just below the sandstone floor, and resting on the upper plastered floor, a ball of stiff earth or clay, which on being broken yielded the following relics.

Gold-----2 impressions in thin gold of the obverse face and a gold coin of Huvishka, joined together, and held by a ring.

1 Crescent of thin gold, 0.6 inch broad.

4 Flowers, 0.75 inch, with a pale sapphire in centre of each.

3 Shells, 0.6 inch long.

4 Kamarak fruits, 0.2 inch broad.

5 Buttons, or knobs, 0.45 inch broad.

26 large discs, 37.5 grains, or 1.44 each.

²⁶² See Chapter 4.

²⁶³ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 20.

29 small discs, 11 grains, 0.38 each.

Silver---5 punch-marked coins, one with human figures, besides many small shapeless fragments.

1 thin hemisphere.

27 large discs.

14 small discs.

Gems---145 Pearls, small, all black with age.

Coral, pale; about 3 Table spoons of bits and several coral shell ornaments.

Crystal, numerous fragments, all uncut.

Sapphires, small fragments, valueless.

Rubies, small fragments, valueless.

Emeralds, small fragments, valueless.

Afterwards it was found, on minute examination, that all the remains of plaster taken off the Sandstone Throne contained small fragments of pounded coral, sapphire, crystal, pearl, etc, of which as much as a basket full was collected (...).

The early date of this deposit is attested by the presence of the five punch-marked silver coins, which would point to a date as early as the 2nd or 3rd century A.D.; when these coins were still current. The gold impressions also of Huvishka's coin would seem to point to the period of his reign as the actual time when the deposit was made, or about 120 to 160 AD.

Dating and tracing the origin of this archaeological deposit was the aim of the study carried out between the BM and V&A. Cunningham himself did not venture a hypothesis as to where these gemstones and other materials came from, although he did identify them to the best of his ability. He did so in the late 1800s after his return to the UK. His identifications were not always correct, but they were remarkably accurate given the resources of his time. In any case, this collection was not given much importance when it was. It has been resting unstudied in the BM for over 100 years.

Although it was once regarded as an unimportant body of material, a detailed study of this collection can provide important information about Buddhist pilgrimage and reveal or confirm facts about the history of BG.

Connection with Sri Lanka

One of the inscriptions found at the site of the Mahābodhi is that of Mahānāman. It is from the Gupta times and thus confirms the connection between Sri Lanka and BG in Gupta times. These links were documented by the Chinese sources in the time of Samudragupta. In Sylvain-Levi's text *The Missions of Hiuen-Ts'e in India*, the following account is given:²⁶⁴

VII.Chap. 29, p.97, col.2.—Le Hing-tchoan de Wang Hiuen-ts'e dit: Dans les royaumes de l'Occident, les bienheureuses images sont sans fin. Et, a propos de l'image de l'arbre de Mo-ho-pou-t'i (Mahabodhi), il dit: Jadis, le roi Cheu-tzeu (Ceylan), nomme Chi-mi-kia-po-mo, ce qui signifie en chinois "merite-nuage" [Koung-te-iun](Cri-Meghavarman), roi indien (fan), chargea deux bhiksus d'aller visiter ce monastere [le monastere eleve par Asoka a l'est de l'arbre de Bodhi, et plus tard agrandi; cf. H.T., Mem., I, 465]. Le plus grand avait nom Mo-ho nan, ce qui signifie "grand-nom" (Mahanaman); l'autre se nommait Ioupo (Upa-). Ces deux bhiksus rendirent homage au Throne-de-diamant (Vajrasana) de l'arbre de Bodhi. Le monastere ne leur offrit pas d'asile; les deux bhiksus revinrent dans leur patrie. Le roi interrogea les bhiksus: "Vous etes alles porter vos hommages aux lieux saints. Que disent d'heureux les presages, o bhiksus?" Ils repondrirent: "Dans la grande contree de Jambudvipa, il n'y a pas un lieu ou demeurer en paix." Le roi, ayant entendu ces paroles, envoya des gens avec des pierres precieuses pour offrir des presents au roi San-meou-to-lo-kiu-to (Samudragupta). Et c'est pourquoi, jusqu'a present, ce sont les bhiksus du royaume de Ceylan qui resident dans ce monastere.

These Sri Lankan gemstones, a gift from the king of Sri Lanka to the king of the Gupta Empire and linked to the erection of a temple, could be the ones found by Cunningham inside the vajrāsana. In order to look into this possibility and potentially identify the gems from BG, gemmological analysis were needed.

Gemmological Analyses²⁶⁵

The Senior Metalwork Conservator and Gemmologist from the V&A Joanna Whalley was invited to the BM on three occasions to study the archaeological collection. During these visits and using specialized equipment, Whalley carefully analysed the pieces of jewellery and each of the gemstones found by Cunningham. This was the first time that a gemmologist had

²⁶⁴ Levi, *Les Missions de Wang Hiuen-Ts'e Dans L'Inde*, p. 317.

²⁶⁵ See Appendix for full report.

looked at the material. The first step, before venturing into hypotheses of origins, was to accurately identify the gems that were still in the original boxes where Cunningham had kept and labelled them.

Analysing the gems and other finds found in the *vajrasana* helps map pilgrimage around the time the deposit was made. After carefully studying the architecture of the Mahābodhi, and based on epigraphical and numismatic evidence found in the back addition of the temple during the excavation, I have determined this deposit to date to around the 6th or 7th century.²⁶⁶ Looking at these materials can lead to a number of interesting conclusions that ought to be studied further and with more specialised technology.

Cunningham, while cataloguing the pieces from the Diamond Throne, labelled a box of green gemstones as 'jade', no doubt attesting to the well-known historical connection between Chinese pilgrims and BG. They were scientifically identified to be aventurines and thus not Chinese. Although the Chinese links with BG are documented in the pilgrims' accounts, there is no material evidence in this deposit that links to them.

The gemmological analyses found numerous pieces of coral, favoured as an offering in South Asia and particularly in Tibet, but no turquoise was identified. This discounts Tibetan presence at BG during the 6-7th centuries, since Tibetan offerings mostly consist of turquoise and coral. The chronology makes sense since Buddhism was being introduced into Tibet at the time of the deposits, and pilgrims were not to visit the site until the circa 11th century. This helps corroborate that the deposit is earlier than the 11th century, a hypothesis also confirmed by the architecture since we know the Burmese restored the temple in the 11th century. At that time, the back addition, built over the *vajrāsana*, was already been in place.

The most important conclusion yielded by the gemmological studies arose from the study of a bracelet made of gold and sapphires, and from also carefully looking at the other boxes containing these gemstones. It was determined, both based on visual examination and scientific analysis, that all the sapphires shared the same origin although they possessed different tones (reason why Cunningham had divided them into groups and kept them in separate boxes). The treatment and other characteristics of the stones confirmed that they were all from Sri Lanka. Corroborating the Sri Lankan presence at BG is key since the few textual sources that have survived from the time, the same ones that detail the erection of a temple by Mahānāman, are from the Gupta times. The deposit was covered in the 6th or 7th century, but could have been placed inside the *vajrāsana* much earlier. In fact, these precious stones and other jewellery items could well be part of the offering that the king of Sri Lanka

²⁶⁶ See Chapter 3.

apparently sent to Samudragupta, which resulted in the construction of the Mahānāman temple and an increased Sri Lankan presence at BG.²⁶⁷ I believe these gemmological studies confirm this claim, although further studies are needed.

Conclusion

This chapter is a focused study of the collection of gems from the *diamond throne*. These were found and sorted by Cunningham, and had remained unstudied until now.

Gemmological analyses on these items helps shed light on geographical connections and pilgrimage networks centred on BG during the medieval period. This is an on-going research that will require further studies and more highly specialised equipment, but the information discovered so far already does much to help map the pilgrims at BG at the 6th-7th century, or earlier.

²⁶⁷ See Chapter 3.

Conclusion

Important archaeological, artistic and literary remains bear witness to BG's enduring significance over the last 2,300 years. It is this place - for many Buddhists the most potent of all Buddhist places - that is the focus of this thesis.

The first monumental remains at BG can be assigned to the time of king Aśoka in the 3rd century BCE and many additions were made thereafter, notably in the early centuries BCE, the 4th-7th centuries CE, and the 11th-12th centuries CE. The site's religious pre-eminence as the "diamond throne" or *vajrāsana* attracted the attention of Buddhists across Asia, with epigraphic and literary materials documenting missions from Sri Lanka, Burma, Tibet, and China. Concurrently, the Mahābodhi stood at the centre of a network of local patronage and within the complex religious landscapes of northern India. After the 14th century, BG declined and eventually the temple was appropriated by followers of the Śaiva faith. British archaeological intervention helped reactivate the site and by the late 20th century BG had regained its position as a key centre of Buddhism and Buddhist pilgrimage.

Bodh Gayā was explored and excavated in the 19th century. A campaign of restoration followed the excavation, leading to the remodelling of the fabric of the Mahābodhi and the reconfiguration of the temple precinct. This obscured the temple's phases of construction and many of the subsidiary shrines in the immediate area, and led to erroneous conclusions being reached in relation to its architecture and art history. A number of sculptures and architectural fragments were removed to museums in Europe subsequent to the restoration, while those items left behind were re-located. Although individual images and types have been studied, many of the sculptures, architectural pieces and archaeological finds have remained unpublished. Meanwhile, texts that refer to the site have been explored only in part. Epigraphs from Bodh Gayā normally exist in single published editions with only a small number receiving further attention. As with most historic places in India, there is a conceptual distinction between "site" and "non-site," with little attention paid to the wider archaeological landscape. Larger theoretical issues were also poorly explored, especially the relationship of the bodhi tree and the Mahābodhi temple, which has been discussed in Chapter 2. This relationship effectively summarizes the polarity between symbol and image in the Buddhist tradition.

With the Mahābodhi further obscured by recent building activity, and archaeological documentation from the early excavations seemingly limited, the prospect of anything but a partial history of the site seems remote. This situation represents an astonishing lacuna at the heart of Buddhism.

This thesis avoided a reductive approach that would deny a multifaceted narrative for BG. Many problems connected with the site's history can be addressed - and new avenues of investigation offered - by returning to the source materials stored in the British Museum, the British Library, and the Victoria & Albert Museum. The aims, therefore, were: (a) to research and identify the source collections from BG in the London museums; (b) to review the literature available on BG; (c) to highlight specific examples to show that the collections have much potential for the understanding of Buddhism and Buddhist history, by shedding light into prior misconceptions on BG's history. Special emphasis was put into studying the development of the site and its pilgrimage, the history of the bodhi tree and its worship, the layered architectural history, and the art of BG.

Given that the BG collections are subsumed in larger institutional and intellectual narratives, this thesis looks at the collections and their histories as a platform for establishing a reliable corpus for further study. My view is that the corpus of BG material in London, while determined by the research agendas and archival strategies of the 19th century, is not constrained by them and that London offers a sufficiently representative sample to address my research question.

APPENDIX

I. Narayan narrates the legends of the cuttings of the bodhi tree as follows:²⁶⁸

After the Nirvana of Tathagata, the King Aśoka succeeded to the throne. As he had faith in false doctrines, he destroyed the vestiges left by Buddha. He started at the time at the head of a large army, to cut down the tree. The root, the trunk, the branches and the leaves were cut and divided into small particles and then at a distance of some tens of pieces to the west side were piled a heap of the debris. He ordered a Brahmin adorer to set fire to burn them as a sacrifice to his God. Before the flames and fumes had dissipated, there was seen the middle of the burning pile two trees issuing forth with leaves rich and verdant. The king Aśoka who had seen the tree of knowledge reduced to cinders, was struck by his miracle, and repented to his crime. He watered the roots which had remained unburnt with perfumed milk, and next morning at the first hour of the day, the tree was restored to its former state. At the sight of this miracle the king was filled to overflowing with joy and goodness and himself made offering. In his delight, he forgot to return home. The Queen who had just before given her faith to heretic doctrines, secretly sent men, who, after midnight, cut down the tree for a second time. In the morning when the king Aśoka came to offer his adorations to the tree, he found that there was nothing of it left but the trunk, and was struck with profound grief. He prayed with sincere favour, sprinkled the root with perfumed milk, and in less than a day found the tree resuscitated. The King, imbued with respect and admiration, surrounded the tree with a stone wall about ten feet high. The enclosure exists to this day. In later times, the king Sasanka, who was attached to heretic doctrines, impelled by base envy, repealed the law of Buddha and destroyed the convents. He cut down the tree of knowledge and dug out the earth to the bottom where the water circulates, but without being able to exterminate the deepest roots. Then he set fire to the ground and stamped the earth with sugarcane juice and sugar to entirely destroy and prevent the fibres from germinating again. Some months after the news of this occurrence reached the ears of Purnabrahma, king of Magadha and the last descendant of the King Aśoka. At this news he said with the sigh, alas, the sure of intelligence had set since many centres, there remained only the tree of Buddha, and behold they have again cut it down, and men shall see it no more. After saying these words, he started at the head of his men, threw himself on the ground, overpowered by transport of grief. The sight was surely painful. He watered the tree with the milk of many thousands of kine, and the course of one night the tree was reproduced entire. Its height was ten feet,

²⁶⁸ Narayan, "Tree Cult in India", p. 78.

apprehending that it might be cut again, he surrounded it with a stone wall 24 feet high and thus in the present day the tree of knowledge is protected by a stone wall which exceeds 20 feet.

II. Due to the arrival of Islam and the decline of Indian Buddhism, the holy sites in Bihār started receiving less and less pilgrims from neighbouring nations in Asia. For example, the Burmese, who had actively visited the site of the Mahābodhi to pay their respects to both the tree and the Diamond Throne for centuries, built their own Mahābodhi temple in Bagan. The Burmese had been actively involved with the temple itself in BG, but after the challenges that arose in Eastern India, they erected a replica (the most accurate found elsewhere in Asia), in their empire's capital [PICTURE]. That way, the Burmese pilgrims could still visit the Mahābodhi and complete the pilgrimage without having to travel to India. Similarly, Mahābodhi replicas appeared in other countries of South East Asia, like Thailand. In other cases, models of the temple were used to facilitate access serving as representations of the holy site for pilgrims. This was the case in Tibet, where models of the Mahābodhi temple (like the V&A wooden one from the 15th century) [PICTURE] were placed in shrines so pilgrims could worship them.

III. Cunningham describes the discovery of the Aśokan shrine:²⁶⁹

After comparing these existing remains with the Bharhut bas-relief I have ventured to sketch out an outline plan of what I suppose the Aśoka Temple may have been.

The size of the middle room in which stood the Vajrasan Throne, V, is determined by the positions of the two Pillar bases P1 and P2, which are 9 feet 10 ½ inches (2.97 m) from centre to centre. As the architrave which covered them could not have been less than 12 feet (3.65 m) in length, I conclude that this room must have been 12 feet broad, and twice as long, because the pillar on each side of the Vajrasan Throne stood opposite the middle of its side. The size of the four side rooms is, I think, pretty clearly shown by the position of the pillar base, P3, as well as by the semi-circular Step, S, which could only have been at the entrance. These data give 9 feet (2.74 m) for the breadth, thus making the whole size of the Temple just 42 feet (12.8 m) by 30 feet (9.14 m), the roof being supported by 12 pillars. In plan it would have been a Greet cross.

The position of the Bodhi Tree must have been inside at B, immediately behind the Vajrasan Throne, as in several sculptures the Bodhi Tree is apparently represented as coming through the roof of the Temple (...).

²⁶⁹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, pp. 6-7.

The remains of Aśoka's surrounding wall were found at F1, F2, and F3. These remains were discovered by making small openings in the outer faces of the plinth of the basement of the present Temple. I was induced to make them in the hope of finding some traces of the old Temple. They were, of course, made at my own expense, and I am glad to say that they were eminently successful, as they brought to light, on two sides, some portions of the plinth of Aśoka's surrounding Railing. At F1 on the west, at a distance of 3 ½ feet inside the mass of the basement, the old wall, 2 ½ feet thick, was traced for a length of 9 feet. On the south side at F2, near the south west corner, the old wall was found at distance of only 1 foot 2 inches inside the mass of the present basement. A third portion was discovered on the east side at F3 on taking up the pavement of the passage leading into the present Temple. The limits of the surrounding wall were thus satisfactorily determined on the west, south, and east sides, while the northern side was laid down by a line equidistant with the south wall from the centre of the Vajrasan Throne. As this line falls within the Cloistered Walk (...), the size of the original area surrounding the Vajrasan has, I think, been very satisfactorily determined.

IV. Sri Lankan inscription found at BG:

Victorious for a very long time is that doctrine, replete with fame, of the Teacher, the chief kinsman of the Sakyas, by which lustrous as the full-moon, the inscrutable primary substance of existence has been pervaded in all directions: by which the warriors, who are heretics, obstructive of the path of beauty, have been broken to pieces, being assailed with weapon logic; (and) by which the whole treasure of religion, that had been stolen by the enemy which is original in nature, has been recovered for the welfare of mankind!

(Line 2-3) –May he, Maha-Kasyapa, who is worthy of praise, protect you,--he who observed the precepts of (Buddha) the chief of saints; who practised that auspicious habits of abstract meditation which is of the nature of a trance; who overcame the anguish of successive states of existence; whose wonderful subjugation of the passions in final emancipation (is to be) displayed in the hand of Maitreya; and by whom the two pure feet of (Buddha) the saint were beheld at the time of attaining Nirvana!

(Line 4-5) –His disciples, endowed with connected tradition of doctrine, purified as to (their) emotions, (and) active compassion for existing beings, roamed at one time over the stainless country at the feet of the mountains of Lanka; and in succession from them there were born, in hundreds, disciples and disciples' disciples, possessed of the virtue of (good) character, who, without the glory of (actual) sovereignty, were the ornaments of a lofty race of kings.

(Line 6) –Then there was the Sramana Bhava, whose welfare was effected by the development of abstract meditation; who discriminated between good and evil, who destroyed error; (and) who possessed an unequalled wealth of true religion.

(Line 7-8) –And his disciple (was) he who had the name of Rahula; after whom (there came) the ascetic Upasena (I); then in succession (there was) Mahanaman (I) (and) after him another Upasena (II), whose special characteristic of affection, of the kind that is felt towards offspring, --for any distressed man who came to him for protection, and for any afflicted person whose fortitude had been destroyed by the continuous flight of the arrows of adversity—extended in conformity with the disposition of a kinsman, (even) to any cruel man who might seek to do (him) harm; (and) by whose fame, arising from good actions, the whole world was thus completely filled.

(Line 9-10) –His disciple, greater (even than himself), (is) he who has the excellent name Mahanaman (II); an inhabitant of Amradvipa; a very ocean of a mighty family; born in the island of Lanka; delighting in the welfare of other; --by him this beautiful mansion of the teacher of mankind, who overcame the power of (the god) Samara, -- dazzling white as the rays of the moon, with an open pavilion on all sides, --has been caused to be made at the exalted Bodhimanda.

(Line 11) –By means of this appropriate (action), let mankind, --freed from attachment to worldly things; having the condition of (mental) darkness dispelled; (and), like (the flame of) a torch, having no adhesion (to material objects), --enjoy the supreme happiness of perfect wisdom!

(Line 12-13) –As long as the sun, the dispeller of darkness, shines in all directions with diffused rays; as long as the ocean (is) full on all sides with its circles of waves that are curved like the hood of hooded snakes; as long as (the mountain) Sumeru, the abode of (the god) Indra, has its summits made beautiful by various jewelled slabs, in such a way as to be full of lustre, --so long let this temple of the great saint attain the condition of being everlasting:

(Line 14) –The year 200 (and) 60 (and) 9; (the month) Caitra; the bright fortnight; the day seven.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Ahir, *Bodh Gaya Through the Ages*, pp. 27-9.

V. Burmese inscription detailing repairs to the Mahābodhi Temple in (Ratna Pāla translation):

This is one of the 84,000 shrines erected by Sri Dharma Aśoka, ruler of the world (Jambodwip), at the end of the 218th year of Buddha annihilation (B.C. 326) upon the holy spot in which Bhagwan (Buddha) tasted milk and honey (Madhupayasa). In the lapse of time, having fallen into disrepair, it was rebuilt by a priest named Naik-Mahanta. Again, after being ruined, it was restored by Raja Sado-Mang. After a long interval it was once more demolished, when Raja Sempyu-sakhen-tara-Mengi appointed his guru, Sri Dharma Raja Guna, to superintend the building. He proceeded to the spot with his disciple, Sri Kasyapa, but they were unable to complete it, although aided in every way by the Raja. Afterwards Varadasi-naik-thera petitioned the Raja to undertake it, to which he readily assented, commissioning Prince Pyutasing to the work, who again deputed the younger Pyusakheng, and his minister, Ratha, to cross over and repair the sacred building. It was thus constructed a fourth time, and finished on Friday the 10th day of Pyadola, in the Sakkaraj year 667. On Sunday, the 8th of Tachhaanmungla, 668, it was consecrated with splendid ceremonies and offerings of food, perfumes, banners, and lamps, and puja of the famous ornamented tree called calpavriksha, and the poor were treated with charity, as the Raja's own children. Thus was completed this meritorious act, which will produce reward and virtuous fruits. May the founders endure in fame, enjoy the tranquillity of Nirbhan, and Arhanta on the advent of Arya Maitri (the future Buddha).²⁷¹

VI. Mitra expressed his disregard for the Burmese interventions at BG as follows:²⁷²

Certain Burmese gentlemen (...) carried out demolitions and excavations round the temple which in a manner swept away most of the old land-marks. The remains of the vaulted gateway in front of the temple had been completely demolished, and the place cleared out and levelled. The stone pavilion over the Buddhapad had been dismantled, and its materials cast aside on a rubbish mound at a distance. The granite plinth beside it had been removed. The sites of the chambers brought to light by Major Mead had been cleared out. The drain pipe and gargoyle which marked the level of the granite pavement had been destroyed. The foundations of the old buildings noticed by Hiouen Tshang around the Great Temple had been excavated for bricks, and filled up with rubbish. The revetment wall round the sacred Bodhi tree had been rebuilt on a different foundation to the west. The plaster ornaments on their interior facing of the sanctuary had been knocked off and covered with a coat of plain stucco, and an area 250 feet by 230 feet levelled and surrounded by a new wall. It is much to

²⁷¹ Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, p. 76.

²⁷² Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, pp. 65-6.

be regretted that the attention of the authorities was not drawn to the subject when the Burmese gentlemen first came to the place, and no means were devised to regulate and control their action. Had this been done, advantage might have been taken of their excavations to trace and identify most of those temples, topes, and other structures mentioned in Buddhist writings and in the travels of the Chinese pilgrim, and thereby to throw much new light on the history of Buddhism and of Buddha. This opportunity has now been lost. The Burmese gentlemen were doubtless very pious and enthusiastic in the cause of their religion, but they were working on no systematic or traditional plan. They were ignorant of the true history of their faith, and perfectly innocent of all knowledge of architecture and the requirements of archaeology and history; and the mischief that they have done by their misdirected zeal has been serious.



Bodh Gaya votive gems	
Equipment used: Microscope (30X); Hand lens (loupe, 10X); Gemmological refractometer; Polariscopes; London dichroscope	
Inv Number	Notes March 2012
92-11-3-39	



Group of 11 gemstone beads on wire, from the right:



1. Beryl, variety **emerald**. Pale and heavily included with natural healed fractures. Natural hexagonal prism crystal, cut in half along the c-axis and then additional facets added to create a very early table-cut, polished overall.
2. Microcrystalline quartz, variety **carnelian**. Faceted with 6 curved planes with tapered ends, flattened hexagon in cross-section.
3. Microcrystalline quartz, variety pale **yellow chalcedony**. Cut as '2'.
4. Quartz, variety **rock crystal**. Interior relatively 'clean'. Refractive index (RI) measured at approx.1.54. Cut as '2'.
5. Microcrystalline quartz, variety pale **brownish-yellow chalcedony**. Cut as '2'.
6. Beryl, variety **emerald**. Small, pale and heavily included with natural healed fractures. Natural hexagonal prism crystal, polished. Possibly Egyptian?
7. Quartz, variety **amethyst**. Cut as '2'.
8. Microcrystalline quartz, variety **carnelian**. Cut as '2'.
9. Garnet, variety **almandine**. Polished irregular form. RI measured at approx.1.77.
10. **Glass** ('paste') faceted bead, greenish-yellow possibly uranium glass. Either view response to UV or check with Geiger counter to confirm. If so, the bead cannot pre-date 1835 (<http://www.sis.org.uk/bulletin/92/Brenni.pdf>). It does not appear in the publication I was shown (photo' above), and would appear to have replaced an amethyst which is unaccounted for.
11. Microcrystalline quartz, variety **carnelian**. Cut as '2'.



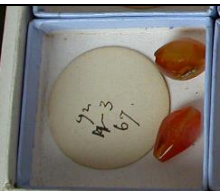
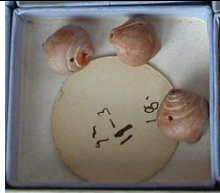



92-11-3-38



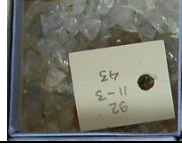






Group of 9 gemstone beads on wire, from the left:

1. White **coral or shell**, carved into form of a conch shell. Wavy parallel growth lines, perpendicular to length of shell-form. Radial lines emanating from a 'core' perpendicular to length of shell-form.
2. **Mother-of-pearl**, carved into unidentified form.
3. Quartz, variety **rock crystal**. Carved into form of a conch shell. RI measures approx. 1.54.
4. Pale orange-red **coral**. Square tabular form, with 4 grooves loosely creating a

	<p>swastika shape. Natural outer surface of coral branch can be seen and can be used to determine orientation of cut. Very probably <i>Corallium rubrum</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mother-of-pearl, carved into unidentified form (praying man?). Glass. Pale green transparent. Distinct gas bubbles. Carved into unidentified flat form. Quartz, variety rock crystal. Carved into unidentified seed-like form. RI measures approx. 1.54. Ancient glass. Badly deteriorated (rainbow iridescence and delaminating). Heavily fractured surface. Pale orange-pink coral. Carved into form of a conch shell. Natural outer surface of coral branch can be seen and can be used to determine orientation of cut. 'Worm holes'. Wavy parallel growth lines and radial lines emanating from a 'core'. Very probably <i>Corallium rubrum</i>
92-11-3-54	<p>Quartz, variety aventurine. Platy green mica, and pyrite inclusions. RI measured in confirmation.</p> 
92-11-3-60	Unknown . Colourless, transparent natural crystal in rhombohedral crystal form (trigonal?). Strong cleavage. Pearly lustre, heavily worn. Needs raman (or SG measurement). Not calcite – no strong double refraction.
92-11-3-73	Malachite . Small fragment with botryoidal growth zones. Possible traces of azurite.
92-11-3-72	Glass . Group of fragments and broken beads. Blue and green, transparent and translucent.
92-11-3-58	Beryl, variety aquamarine . 22 natural crystals (plus one glass fragment imitation which was moved to 92-11-3-72)
92-11-3-62	Labelled 'aquamarine', but all glass . Moved to 92-11-3-72.
92-11-3-47	<p>Pair of amethyst cabochons. One is a high cabochon with a polished recess on the reverse (a 'carbuncle'). This has been done in order to lighten the colour by removing material as well as increasing the surface area for reflection. The surface of the cabochon is extremely heavily worn, though the lower edge is not, suggesting it was once set in the rub-over setting of a much-loved object. The colour and clarity of both these cab's is unusually fine. This shade of velvety reddish-purple is one which, in Europe, has been commonly associated (perhaps wrongly!) with Siberian amethysts from the Urals.</p>
August 2012	
92-11-3-13	 <p>String of raised 4 shells and 4 flowers in gold; each of the flowers set with a sapphire.</p> <p>The sapphires appear to have derived from an alluvial source (pebble-like in form with 'frosting' in the recesses). They have each been polished whilst retaining as much weight as possible.</p> <p>The gems are naturally pale in colour and show distinct colour zoning; one having a particularly deep colour saturation to one side. There are a number of neat intersecting fingerprint-type feathers with folds and some short, aligned, colourless tube-like crystals/cavities. These inclusions are distinctive and may help to identify the source. The loose sapphires of 92-11-3-40 (below) share exactly the same characteristics and appear to have derived from the same source.</p>
92-11-3-52, 53	<p>Four colourless, transparent forms:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Quartz variety rock crystal. Oval cabochon (10.6 x 8 x 4.5mm)

	<p>2. Quartz variety rock crystal. Large oblong cabochon, underside sheered off (may be useful to check in which direction the optic axis lies; could this have been a lens of some sort?!)</p> <p>3. Quartz variety rock crystal. Two fragments of the same spherical bead.</p> <p>4. Fragment of broken glass.</p>	
92-11-3-60	Unknown natural crystal. Colourless transparent material with rhomboid form, cleavage planes parallel to the c-axis. Possibly orthoclase or topaz? Unlikely to be calcite as the birefringence does not appear strong enough. Currently labelled 'moonstone'	
92-11-3-63	Pink tourmaline . Natural unpolished crystal.	
92-11-3-66	Microcrystalline quartz, variety sard . Two small fragments from an oval intaglio plaque, measuring 0.71mm in depth. When the engraving is correctly aligned, the lower part of a figure is revealed: legs and robe (draped from the waist down and cross-hatched from the waist up).	
92-11-3-67	Microcrystalline quartz, variety carnelian . Two beads, faceted with 6 curved planes parallel to the bore-hole. Tapered ends.	
92-11-3-68	Three pale pink coral beads, carved into form of conch shells. Each of the beads is pierced twice in two opposing directions. The surfaces are eroded but wear indicates are that the original colour was much deeper, possibly red. Probably <i>Corallium rubrum</i>	
92-11-3-69	43 pale pink coral barrel-shaped beads of varying size, including broken fragments. The surfaces are eroded but wear indicates are that the original colour was much deeper, possibly red. Probably <i>Corallium rubrum</i>	
92-11-3-71	70 natural pearls ; all beads or fragments of beads. Various sizes and levels of deterioration. Many appear bluish, though this colour may be the result of deterioration.	
92-11-3-40	<p>Corundum, variety sapphire. 12 present, though an earlier inventory records 14. Generally pale blue in colour. The appearance of these gems suggests an alluvial source in that some recesses retain a 'frosted' appearance. The gems have been polished lending cabochon form whilst retaining as much of the weight as possible (the original crystal habit is still discernable for most).</p> <p>Inclusions present: distinctive blue/colourless colour zones; light 'silk'; short aligned colourless tube-like crystals/cavities; neat intersecting fingerprint-type feathers with folds. Gübelin and Koivula's <i>Photoatlas of Inclusions in Gemstones, Vol III</i> might be of help in determining origin (currently unable to gain access). Possibly Sri Lanka or Kashmir.</p>	
92-11-3-41	Corundum, variety sapphire . Broken fragments of pale blue and colourless sapphires.	

		
92-11-3-42	Corundum, variety sapphire . Broken fragments of generally darker blue sapphires.	
92-11-3-43	Corundum, variety sapphire . Broken fragments of colourless sapphires.	
92-11-3-44	Corundum, variety ruby . Broken fragments of rubies.	
92-11-3-48	Garnet, variety almandine (refractive index measuring 1.765). Teardrop-shaped cabochon bead, borehole situated halfway down teardrop form.	
92-11-3-49	Garnet, variety almandine (refractive index measuring 1.773).	
92-11-3-50	Garnet , broken fragments	
92-11-3-53	Quartz variety rock crystal . Polished hexagonal prism (natural crystal form having had pointed terminal removed).	
92-11-3-55	Unknown . Two items. This material has been formerly identified as chrysoberyl. This is possible, but colourless chrysoberyl is rare and these gems have no obvious diagnostic features. An alluvial pebble (containing a brownish inclusion) and a broken fragment. Suggest Raman for confirmation.	
92-11-3-56	Seven green gems: A. Translucent green glass ('paste') moulded into a 'table-cut' form, with a flat back. Inclusions: bubbles and swirls (of paler colour). This gem was used as a deliberate simulant of emerald – a useful comparison being the real emerald of 92-11-3-39 (No. 1) which has been polished into the same form. B. 2 x beryl, variety emerald . Natural hexagonal prisms, polished and pierced along the 'c'-axis to form beads. One large black inclusion has been deliberately polished from the surface of one of the beads leaving a small recess and traces of the inclusion itself. C. 2 x beryl, variety emerald . Natural hexagonal prisms, polished; not pierced. One shows evidence of the removal of an inclusion (oval recess on surface). D. Unknown . Small fragment of greenish-blue opaque rough material. Possibly turquoise or pale malachite. Raman needed. E. Unknown . Fragment of pale green translucent natural crystal with mica matrix. Hexagonal or trigonal crystal system, with longitudinal striations to the surface parallel to the 'c'-axis. Probably tourmaline or emerald. Raman needed.	  
92-11-3-73	Malachite nodule. Current label 'glass' is incorrect.	

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Introduction

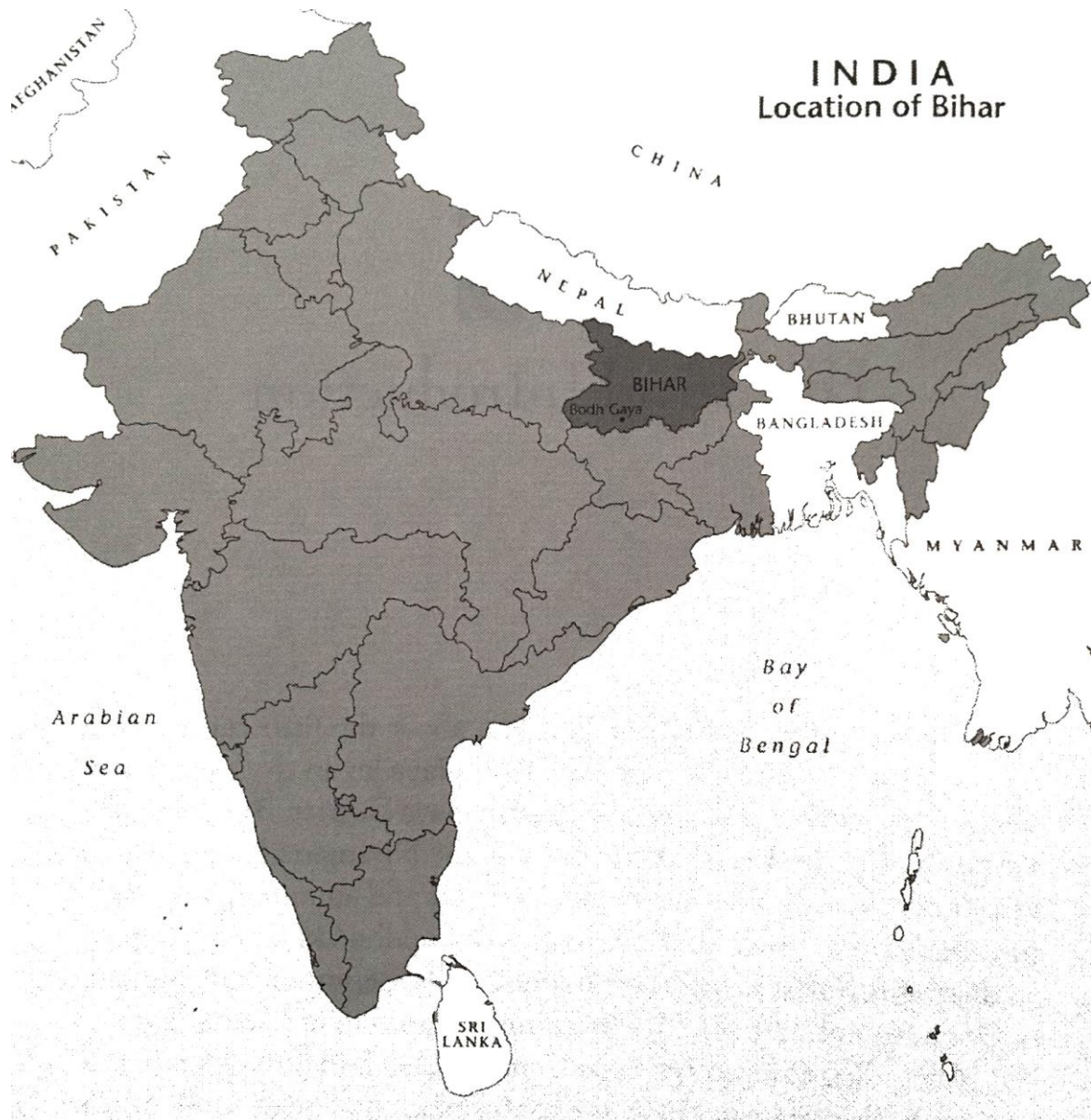


Fig. I Map of India showing Biḥār.



Fig. II Map of Bihār showing the Buddhist sites.



Fig. III Site plan of the Mahābodhi complex, with the temple shaded. (Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*).



Fig. 1.1 Group of Sculptures found at BG.(Cunningham Collection, picture 29, British Museum).



Fig. 1.2 Group of Sculptures found at BG (Cunningham Collection, picture 25, British Museum).

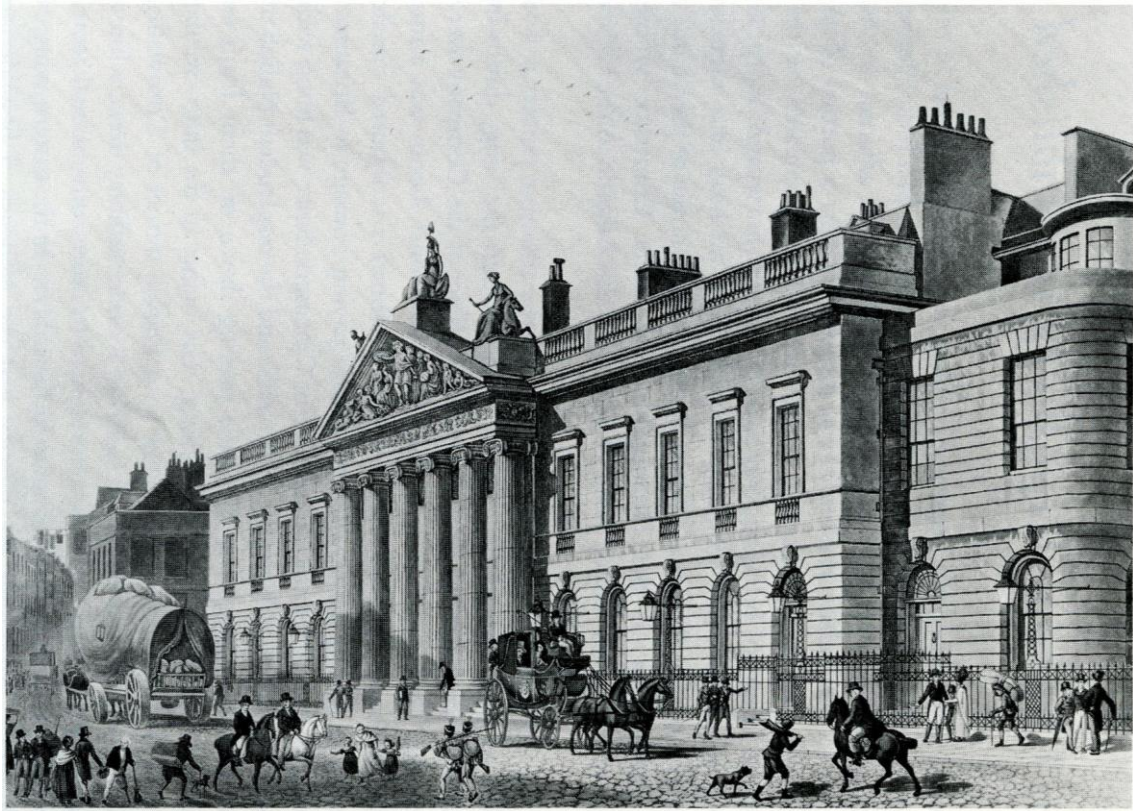


Fig. 1.3 East India House, Leadenhall Street, London. Drawing by T. H. Sheperd, India Office Library, 1817 (Desmond, *India Museum*).

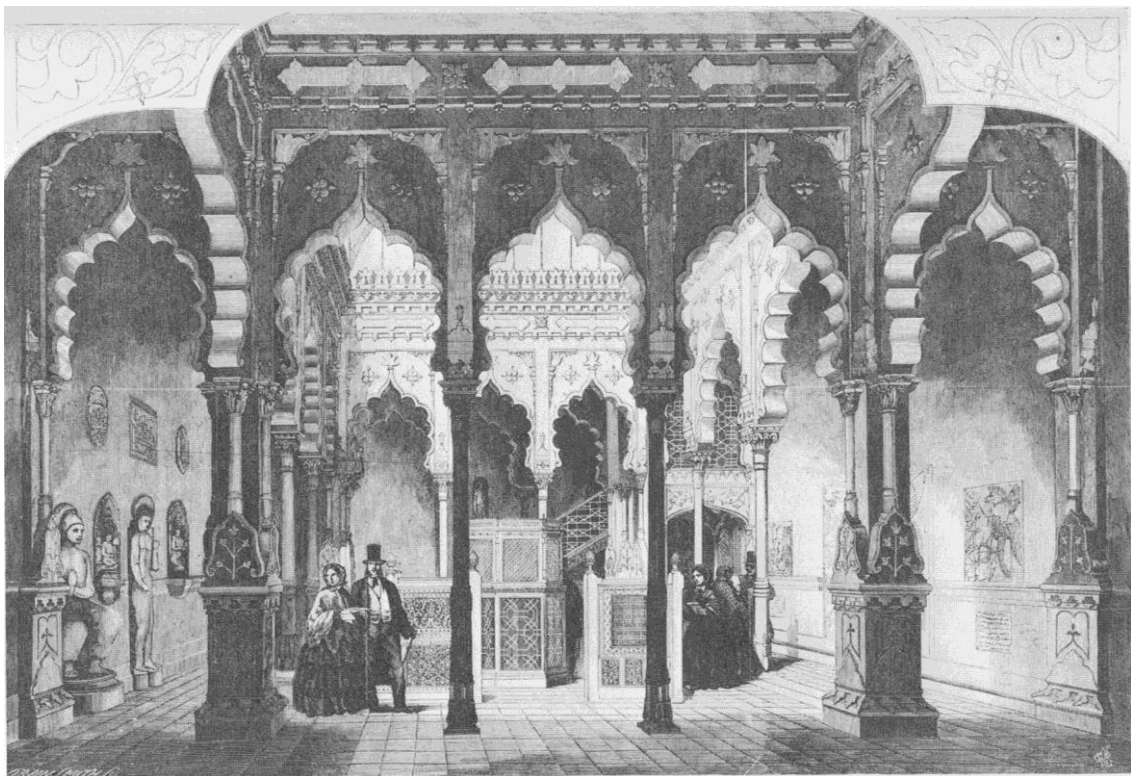


Fig. 1.4 India Museum (Desmond, *India Museum*).



Fig. 1.5 India Museum at Fife House, Whitehall. Published in *Illustrated London News*, 1861. (Desmond, *India Museum*).

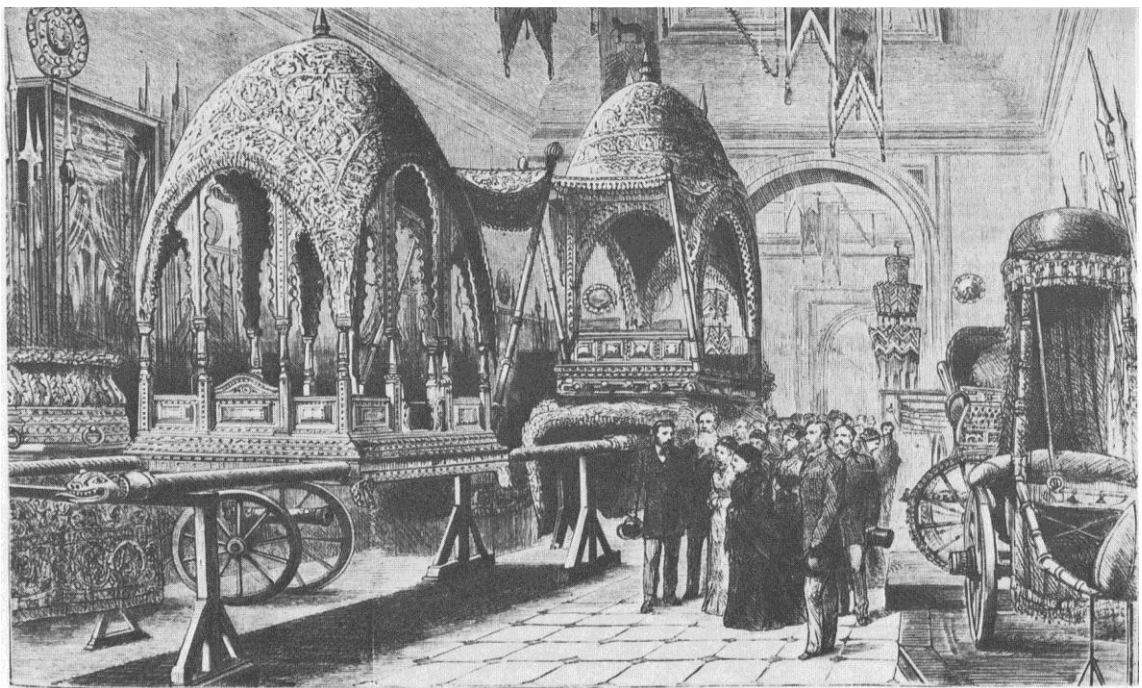


Fig. 1.6 Visit of the Queen and the Prince and Princess of Wales in May 1880 on the occasion of the opening of the Indian Section of the South Kensington Museum. (Desmond, *India Museum*).

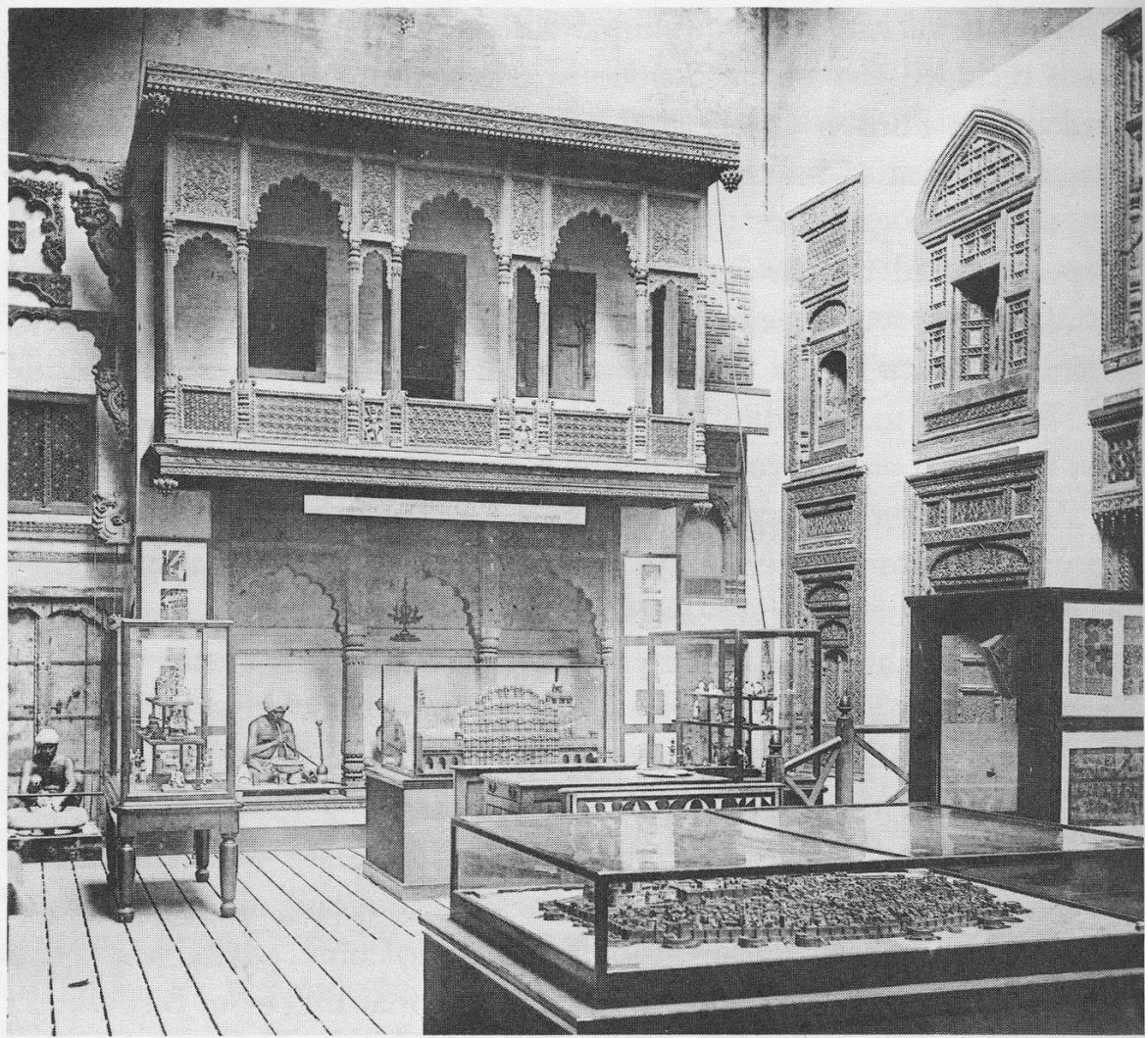


Fig. 1.7 Indian Section of the South Kensington Museum in 1890. (Desmond, *India Museum*).



Fig. 2.1 Relief representing BG (Cunningham, *Stupa of Bharhut*).



Fig. 2.2 Relief representing the bodhi tree and the *vajrāsana* (Cunningham, *Stupa of Bharhut*).



Fig. 2.3 Eastern gateway of Sāñchī depicting BG (www.budhanet.com).



Fig. 2.4 Group of Hindu Sculptures at BG (Henry Baily Wade Garrick, ASI Collection, 1880; Photo: 1003/(70); Item: 100370; British Library).

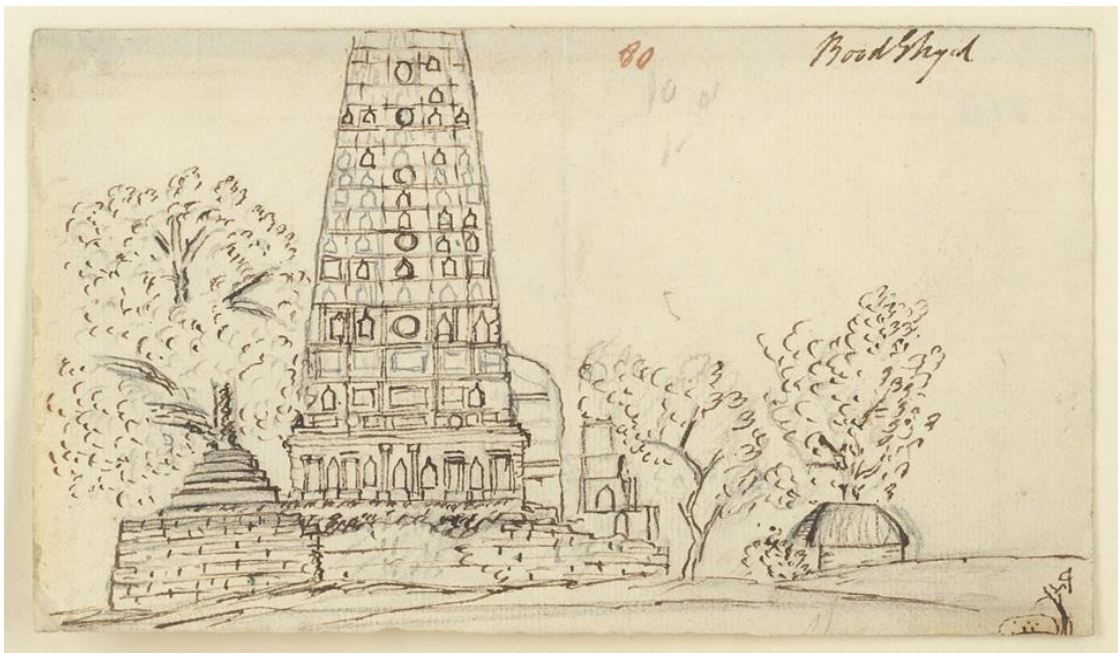


Fig. 2.5 Drawing of the Mahābodhi showing the bodhi tree (Anonymous, Mackenzie Collection, 1800; Shelfmark: WD810; Item: 810; British Library).



Fig. 2.6 View of the Mahābodhi and bodhi tree (Beglar, ASI Collection, 1870; Photo: 10031(54); Item: 100354; British Library).



Fig. 2.7 View of the site at BG (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 2.8 Detail of the platform and bodhi tree before the restoration works (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 2.9 View of the bodhi tree in 1870, showing the damaged branches (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 2.10 View of the excavations at the back of the Mahābodhi, no tree visible (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 2.11 View of the Mahābodhi covered in scaffoldings, no tree visible (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 2.12 View of the young bodhi tree and the *vajrāsana* in the 1890s (Theosophical Society of India).

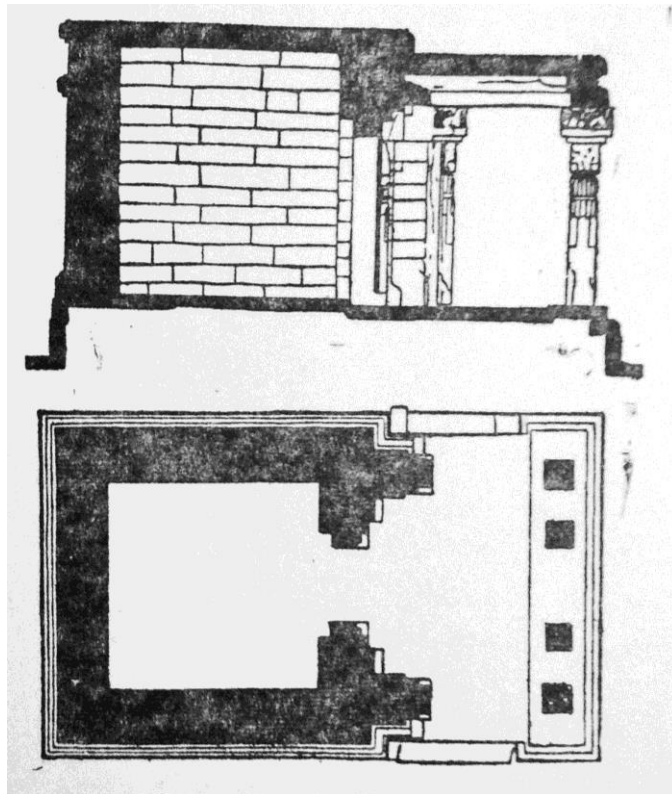


Fig. 3.1 Gupta temple section and plan (Agrawala, *Gupta Temple Architecture*).

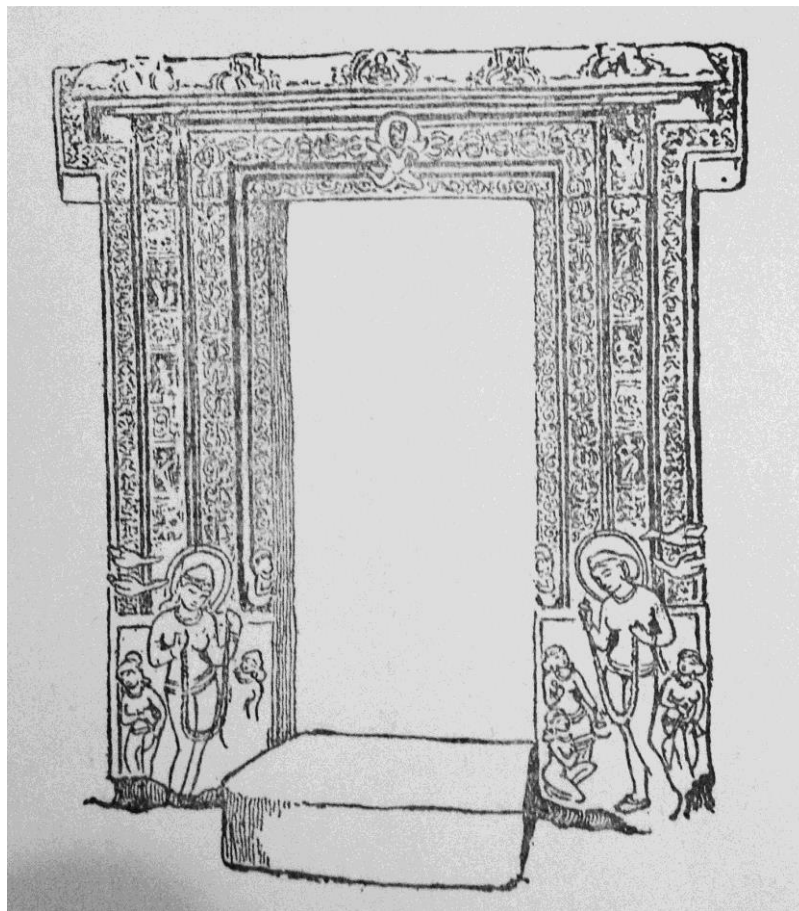


Fig. 3.2 Gupta doorway (Agrawala, *Gupta Temple Architecture*).

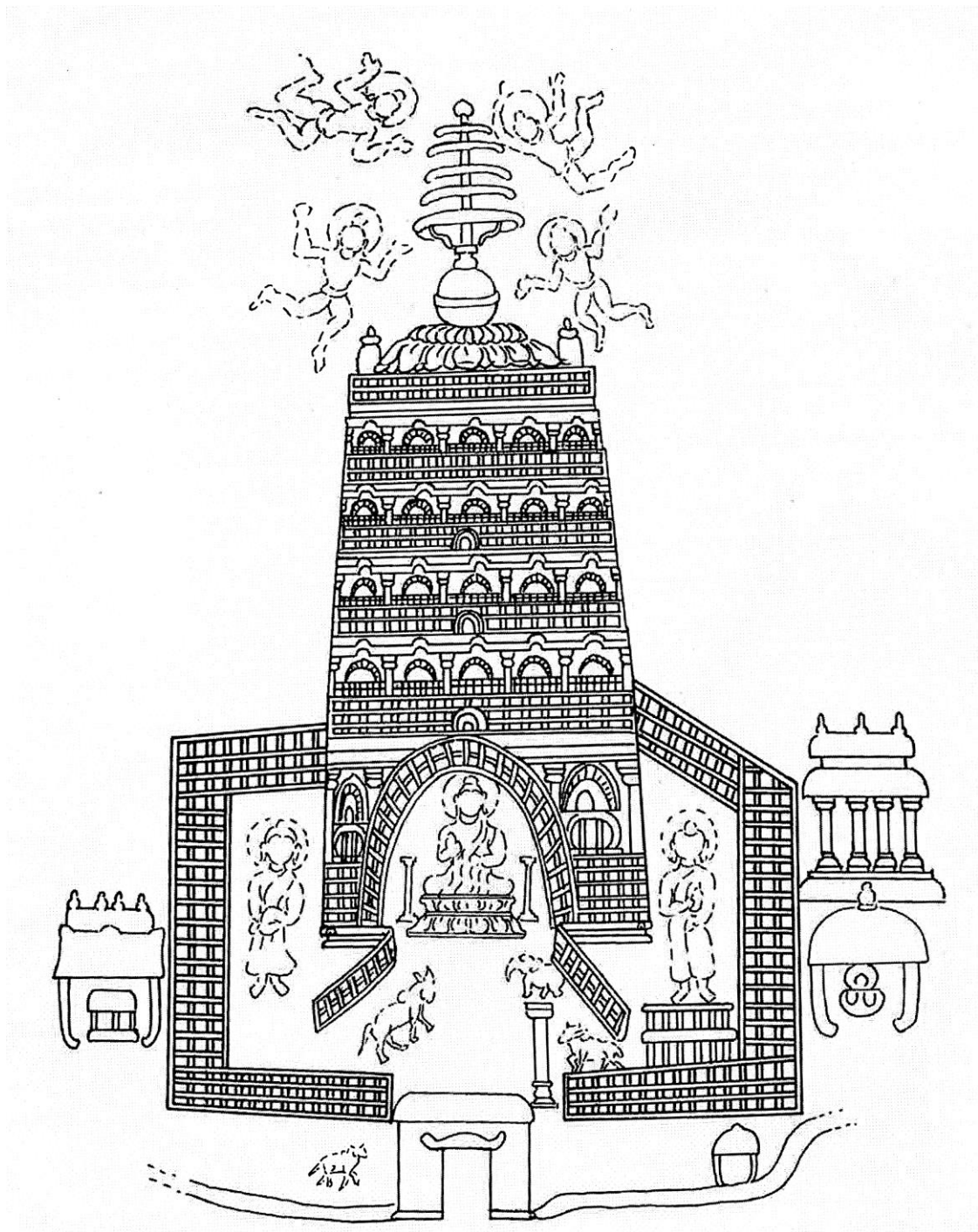


Fig. 3.3 Depiction of BG in the Kumrahar plaque (Meister, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture*).

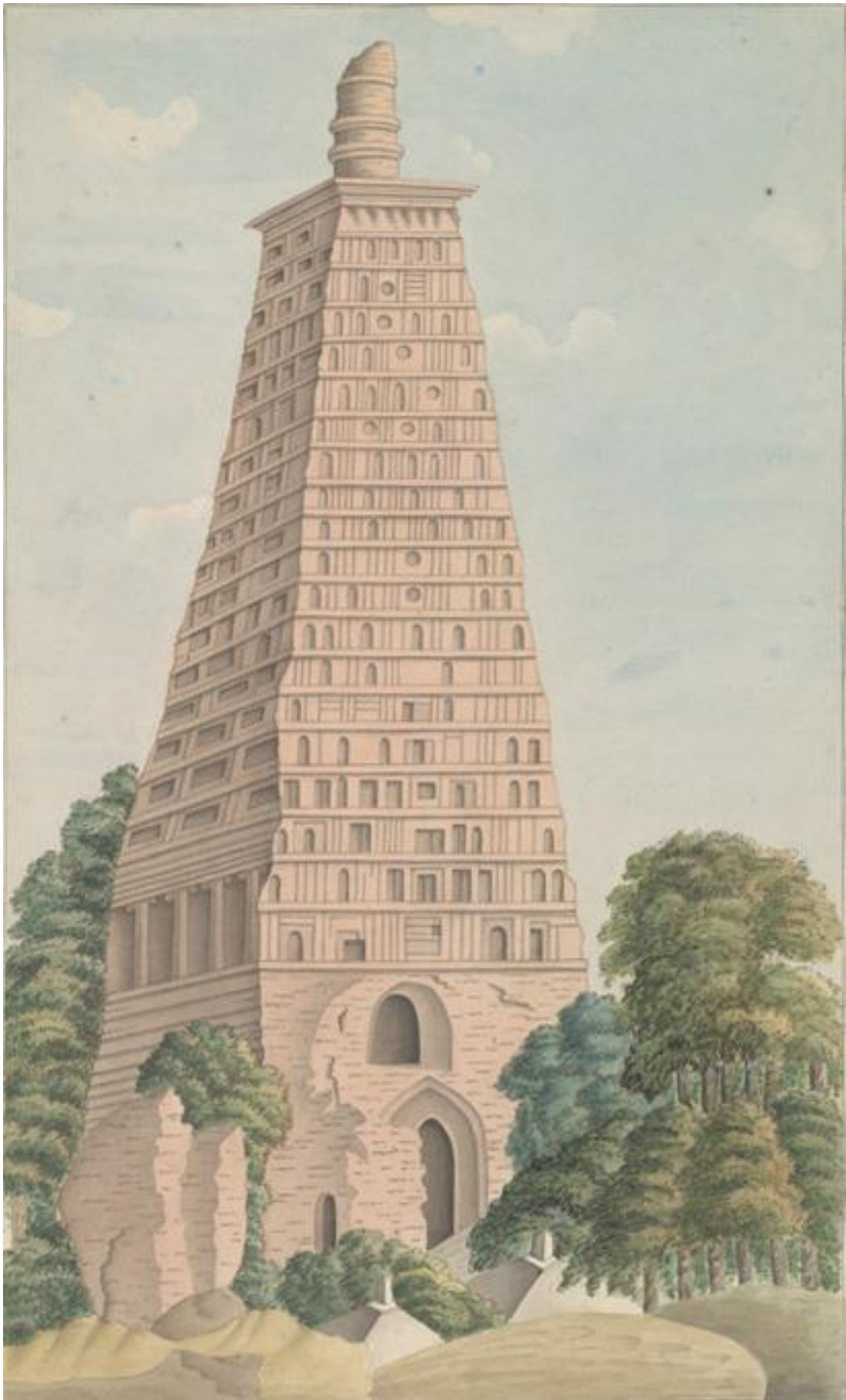
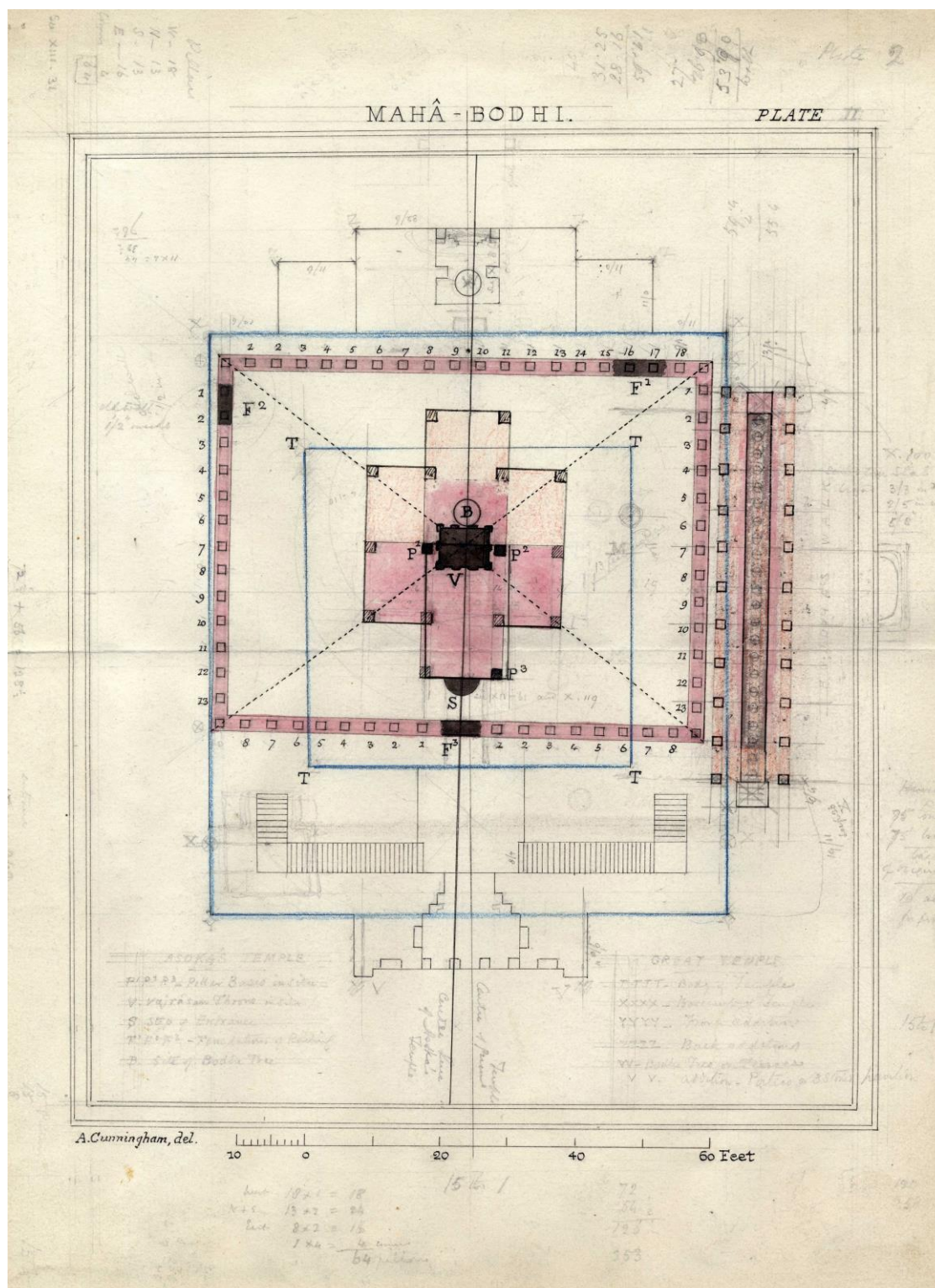


Fig. 3.4 Drawing of the Mahābodhi showing its pyramidal tower (Anonymous, 1800, Shelfmark: WD699, Item: 699; British Library).



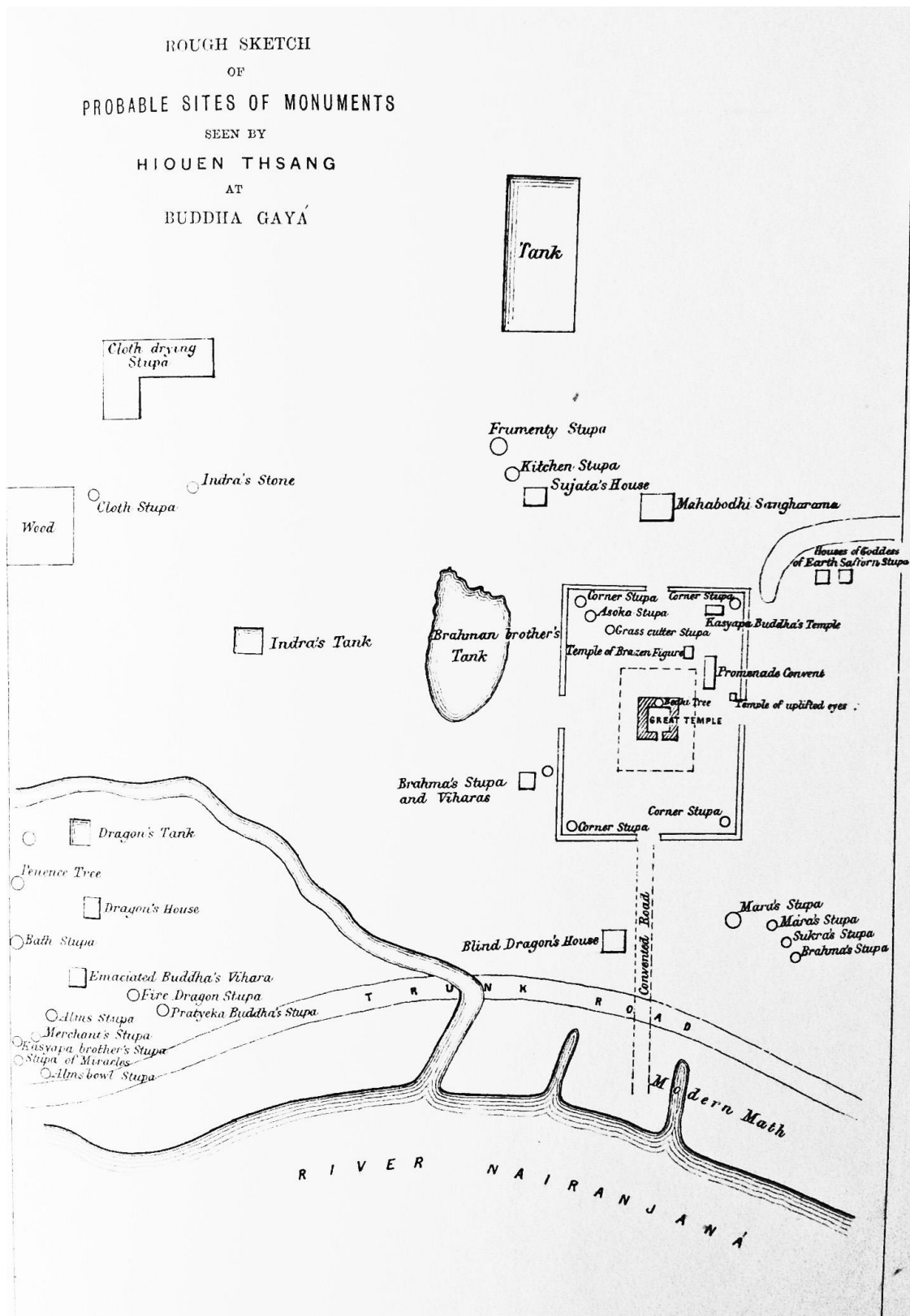


Fig. 3.6 Plan illustrating what Xuanzang might have seen during his visit to BG (Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*).

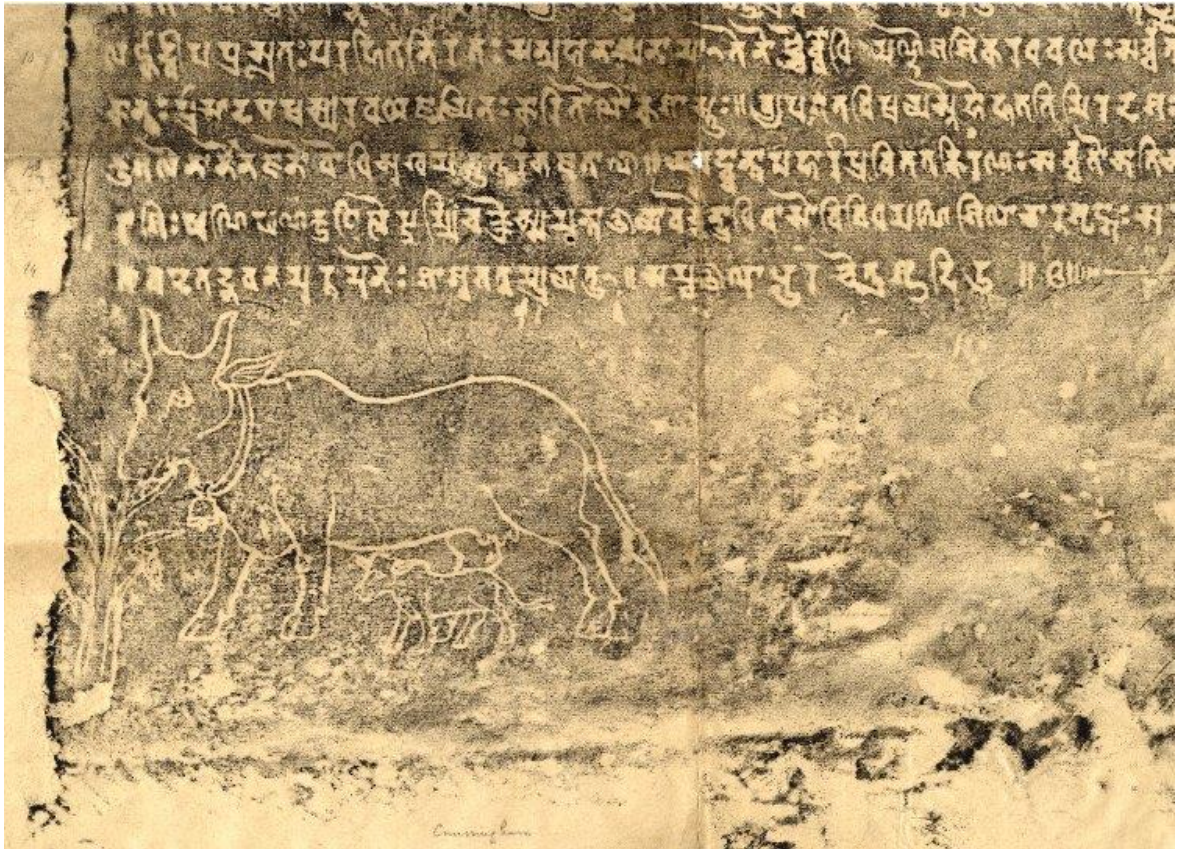


Fig. 3.7 Fragment of the rubbing of the BG inscription of Mahānāman; ink on paper mounted on card (British Museum object no. 1892, 1103.199).

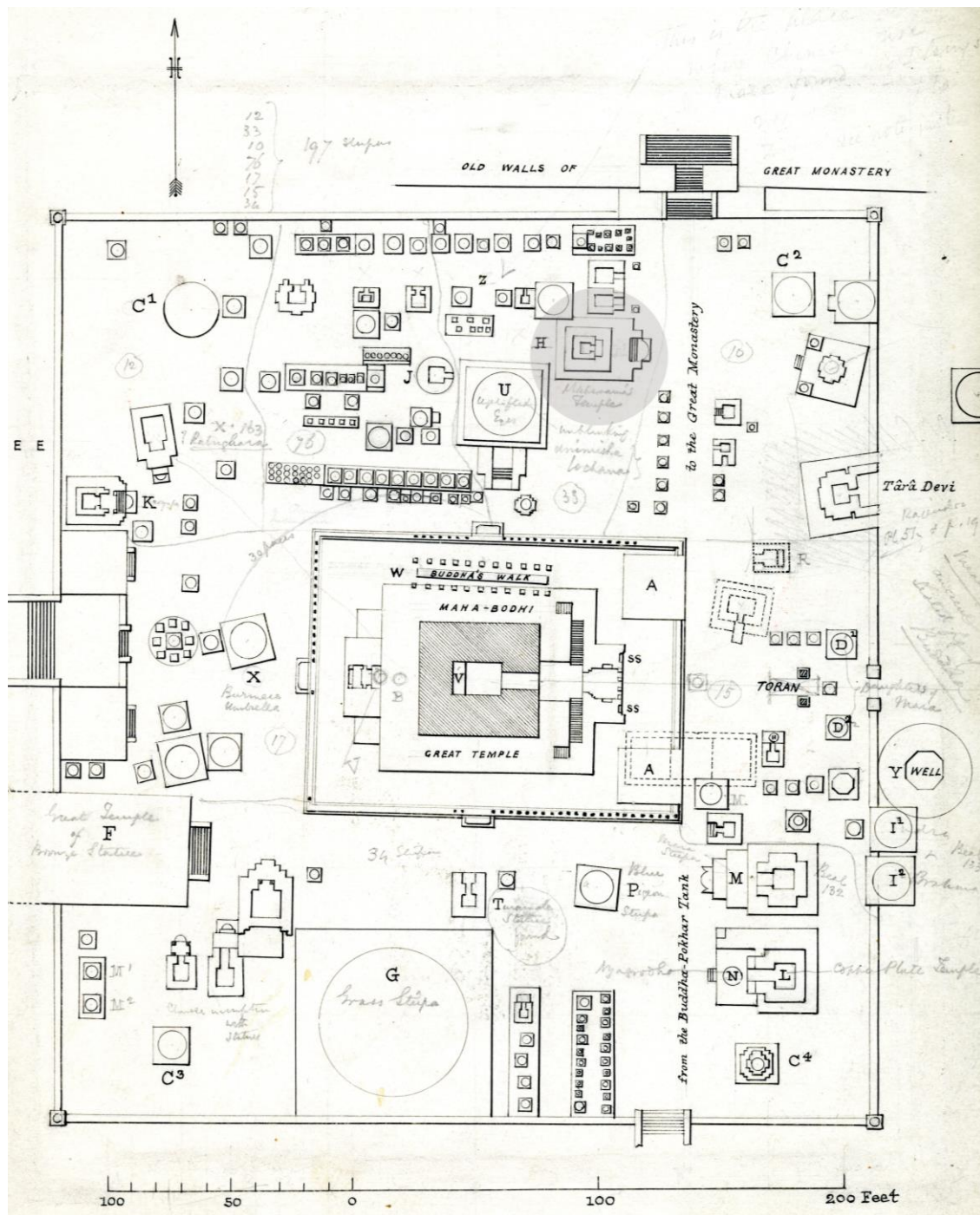


Fig. 3.8 Site plan showing the Mahānāman temple (encircled), as identified by Cunningham (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 3.9 Picture showing the back additions of the Mahābodhi (Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, Plate XII).



Fig. 3.10 Detail of the niches of the back additions (Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, Plate XV).



Fig. 3.11 Mahābodhi temple before the restoration (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 3.12 Mahābodhi pagoda in Bagan, Myanmar (J. Jackson, 1868; Photo: 1099/(37); Item: 109937; British Library).

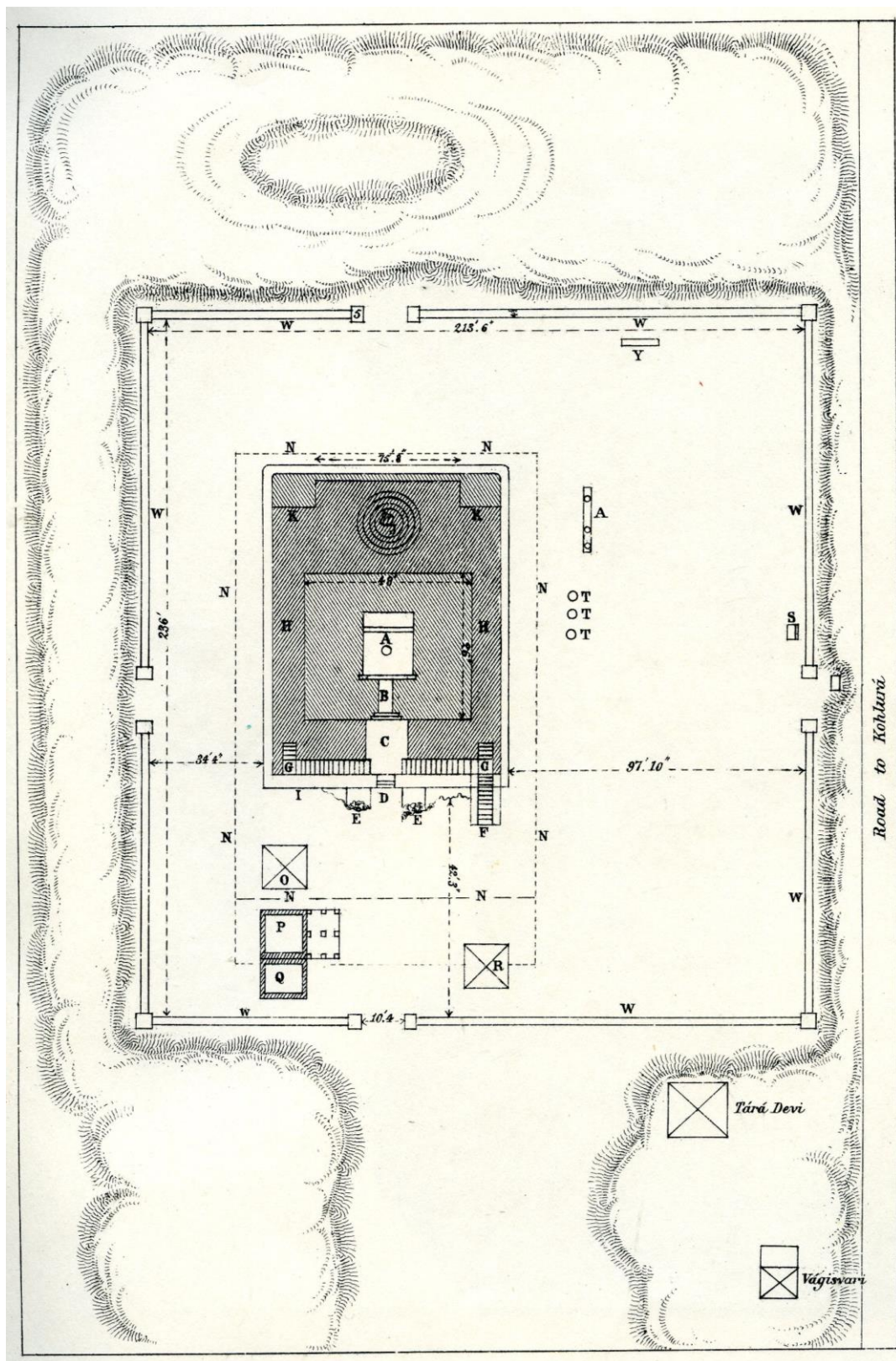


Fig. 3.13 Plan of the Mahābodhi in 1877 (Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*).

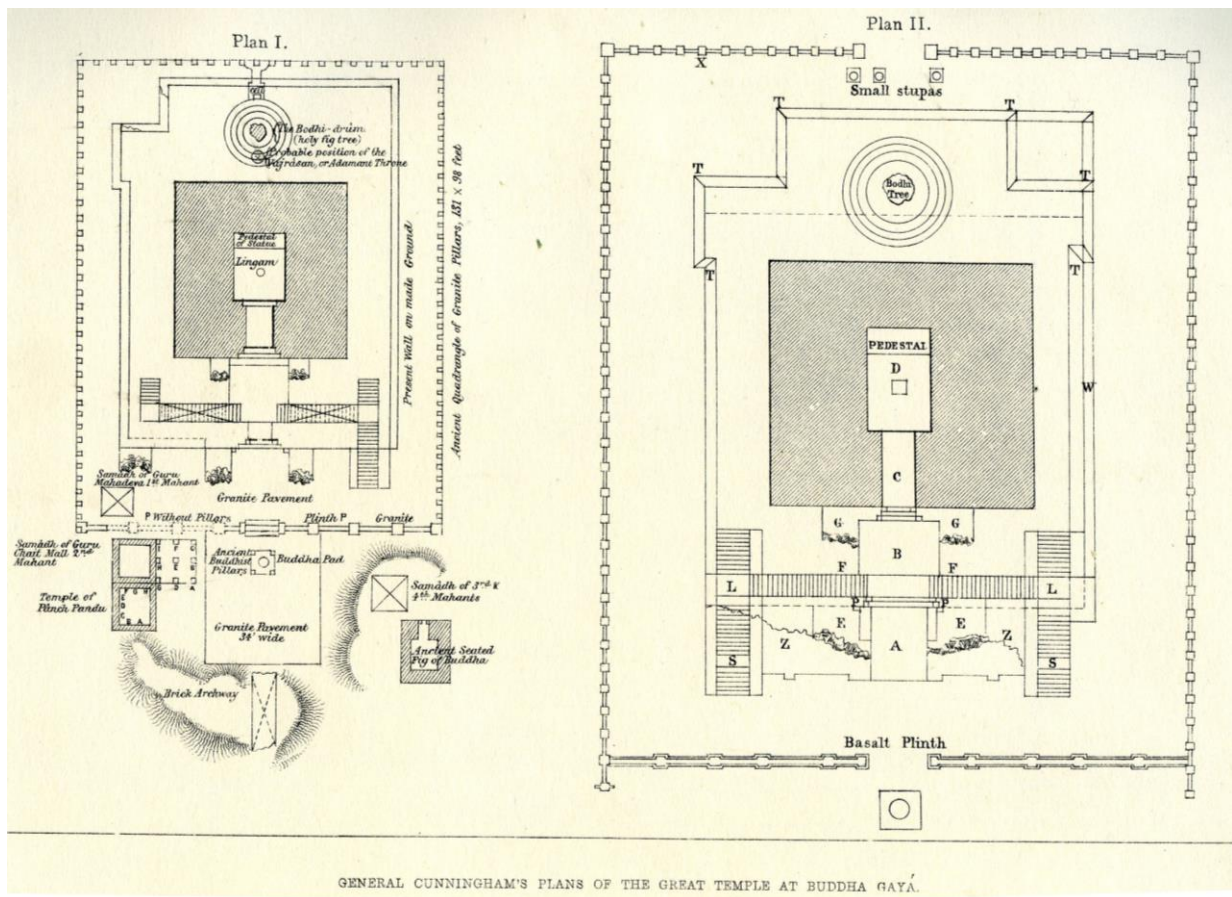
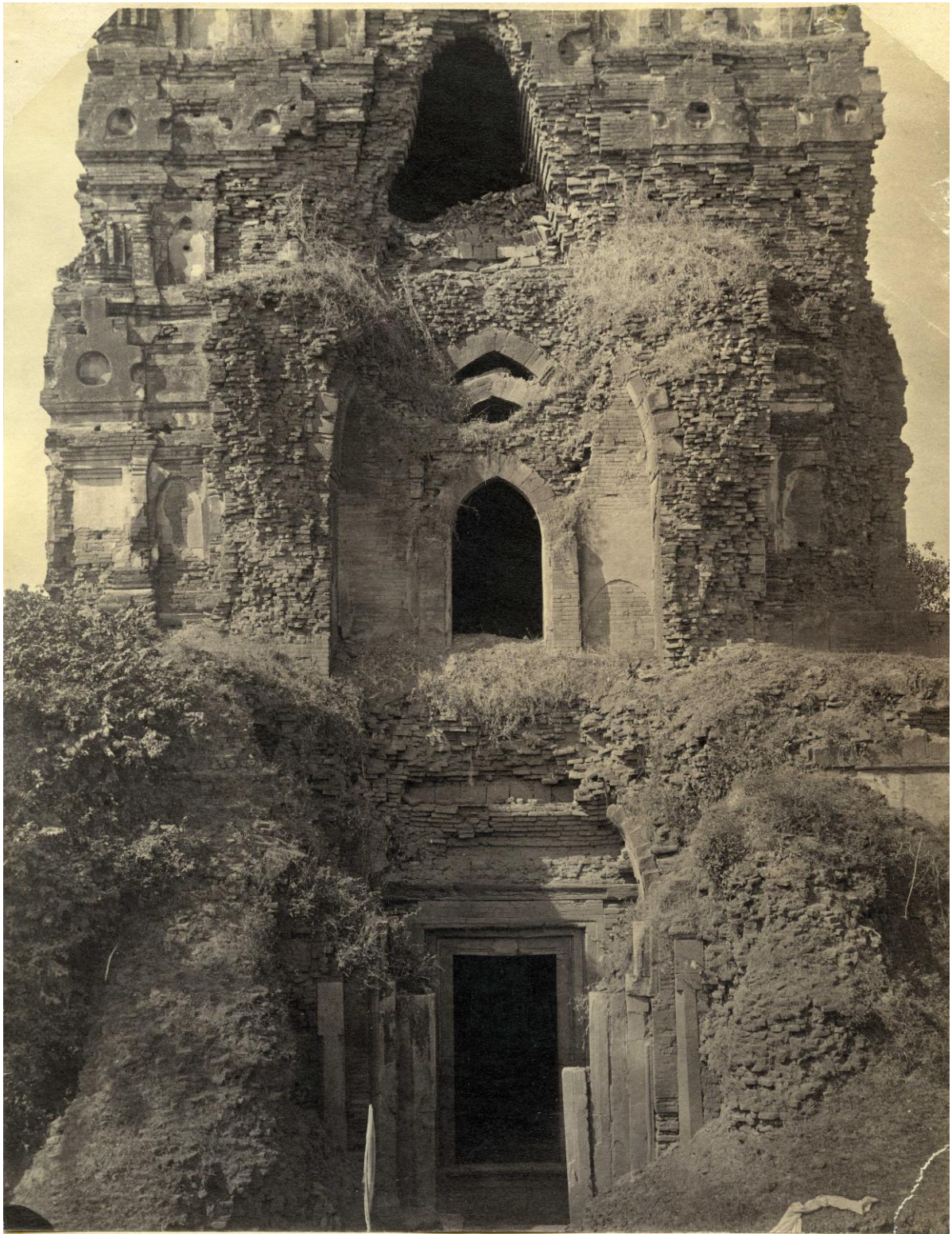


Fig. 3.14 Plans for the restored Mahābodhi temple (Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, Plate IV).



Mahābodhi Timeline

Fig. 3.1 The temple before the restoration (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 3.II Details of the interior of the Mahābodhi before the restoration works (Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*).



Fig. 3.III View of BG during the beginning of the restoration works (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 3.IV Mahabodhi temple under restoration (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 3.V Removal of the back addition (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).

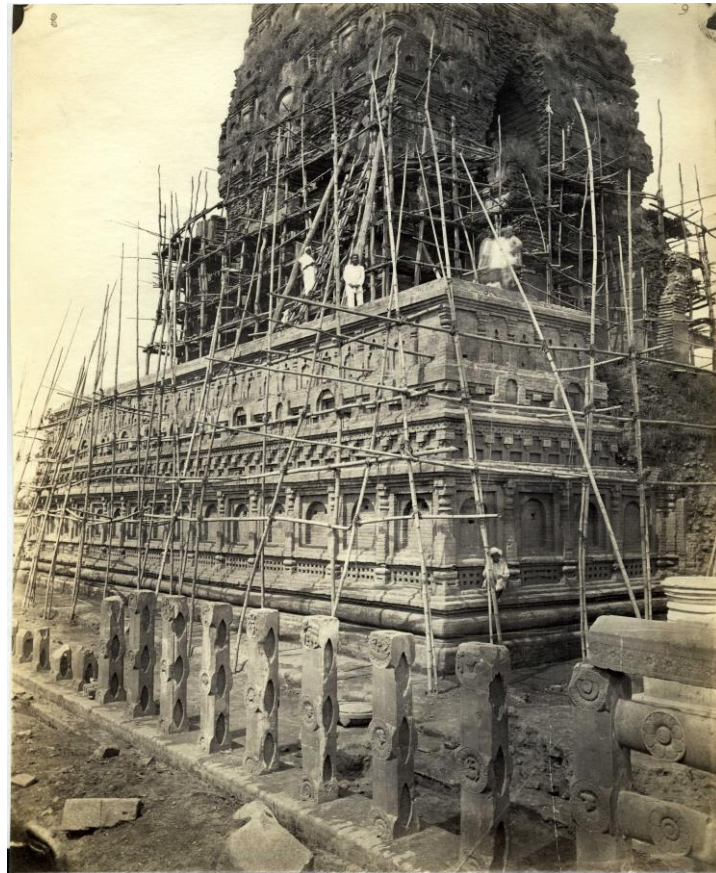


Fig 3.VI The back of the temple covered in scaffolding (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 3.VII The Mahabodhi's tower covered in scaffolding as the restoration works progressed (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 3.VIII The Mahābodhi from the south-west during the restoration (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 3.IX The restored Mahābodhi (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 3.X The restored Mahābodhi, view of the front of the temple (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).

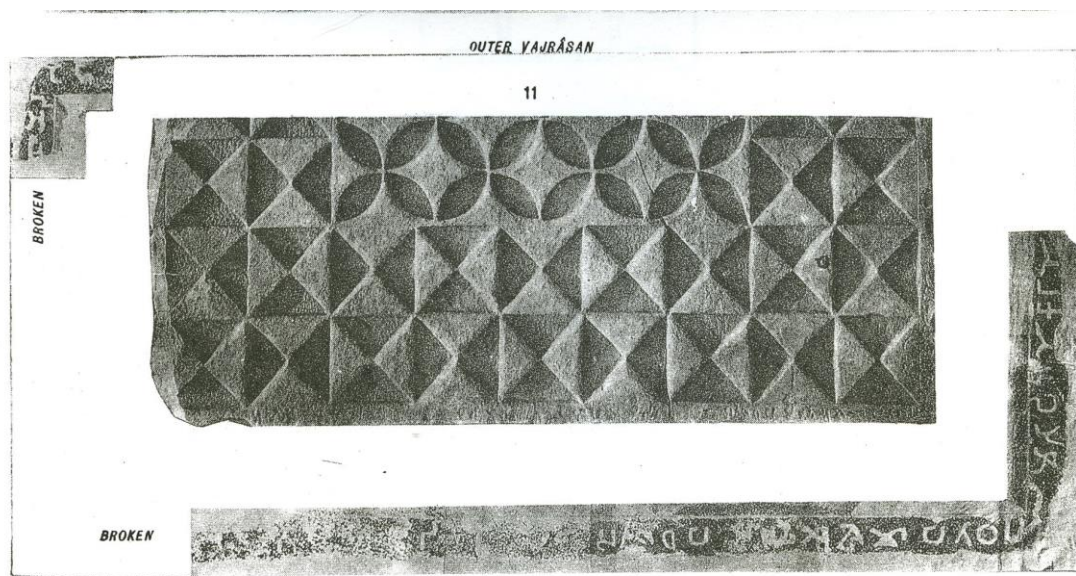


Fig. 4.1 View of the *vajrāsana* slab (Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, plate X).



Fig. 4.2 The *vajrāsana* as found by Cunningham, with Gupta sculptures on its base (Cunningham, *Mahābodhi*, Plate XIII).



Fig. 4.3 Details of the *vajrāsana* (Falk, *Aśokan Artefacts*).

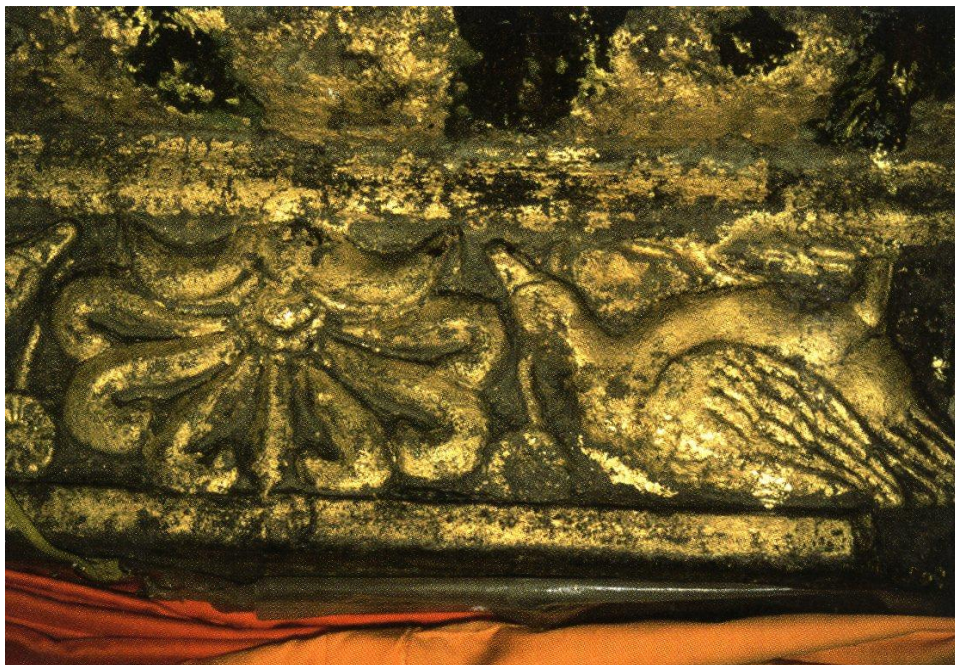


Fig. 4.4 Close up on details of the *vajrāsana* (Falk, *Aśokan Artefacts*).

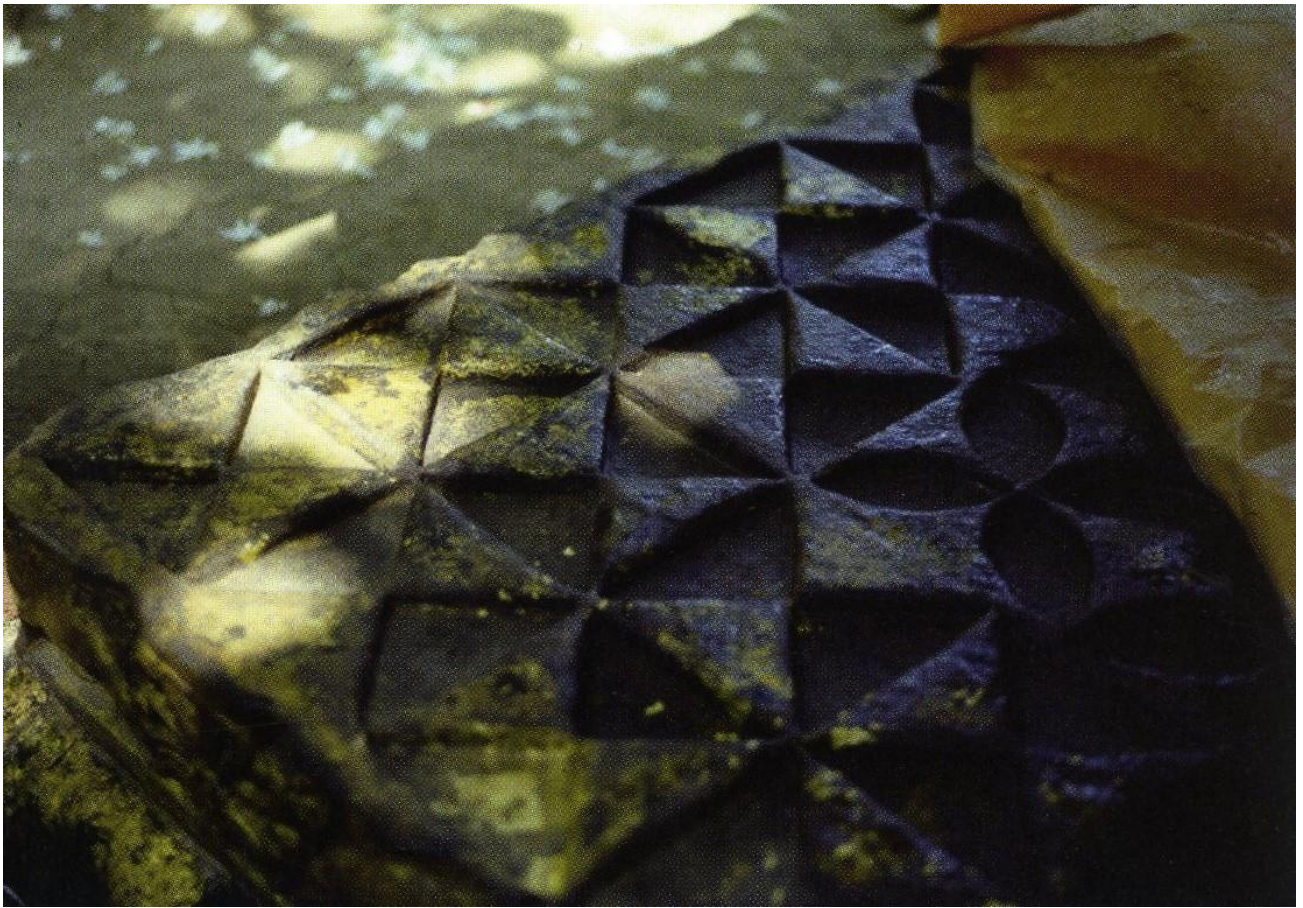


Fig. 4.5 Detail of the pattern of the top of the *vajrāsana* (Falk, *Aśokan Artefacts*).



Fig. 4.6 BG Pillar (V&A IS.1065-1883).



Fig. 4.7 BG Pillar (V&A IS.1065-1883).



Fig. 4.8 Detail of the figures of the BG Pillar (V&A IS.1065-1883).



Fig. 4.9 Coin of *Huvishka* (BM 1889,1103.14).



Fig. 4.10 Bodhisattva (Sarnath Museum).



Fig. 4.11 Umbrella of Bodhisattva (Sarnath Museum)

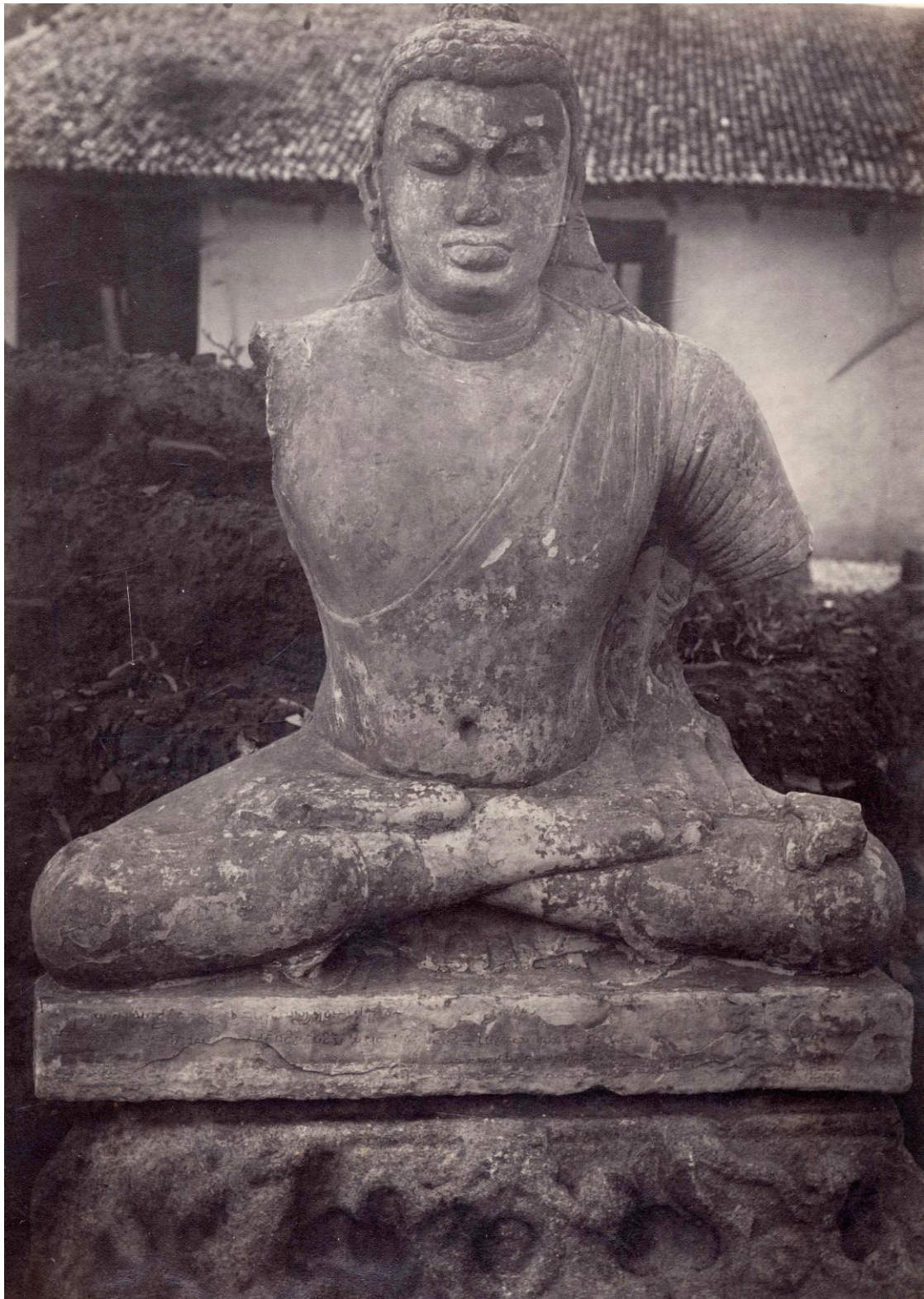


Fig. 4.12 Buddha at BG, now in the Indian Museum of Kolkata (BM 1897,0508,04).

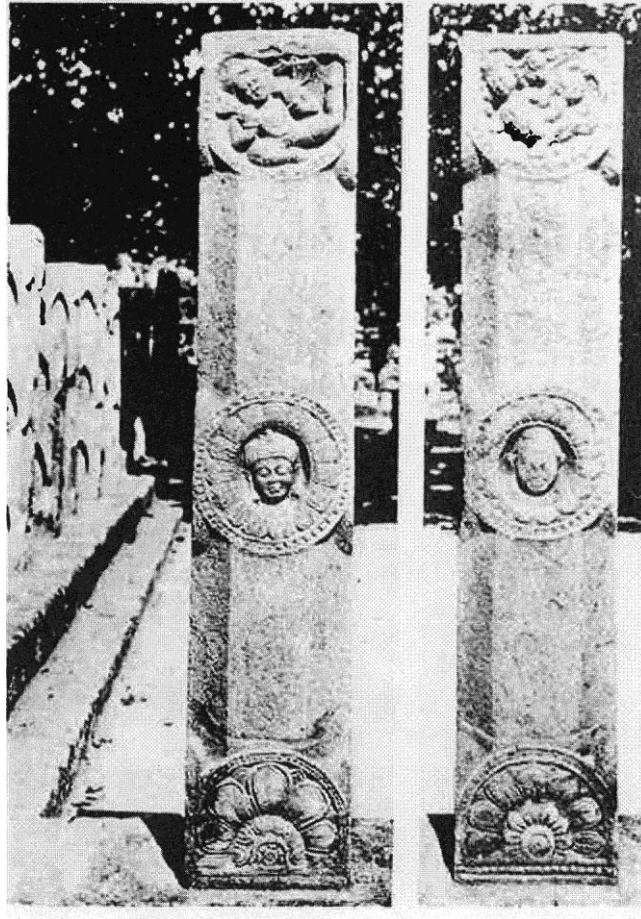


Fig. 4.13 Railing Pillar (Asher, *The Art of Eastern India*, Plate XXI).



Fig. 4.14 Railing Pillar medallion (Asher, *The Art of Eastern India*, Plate XXII).

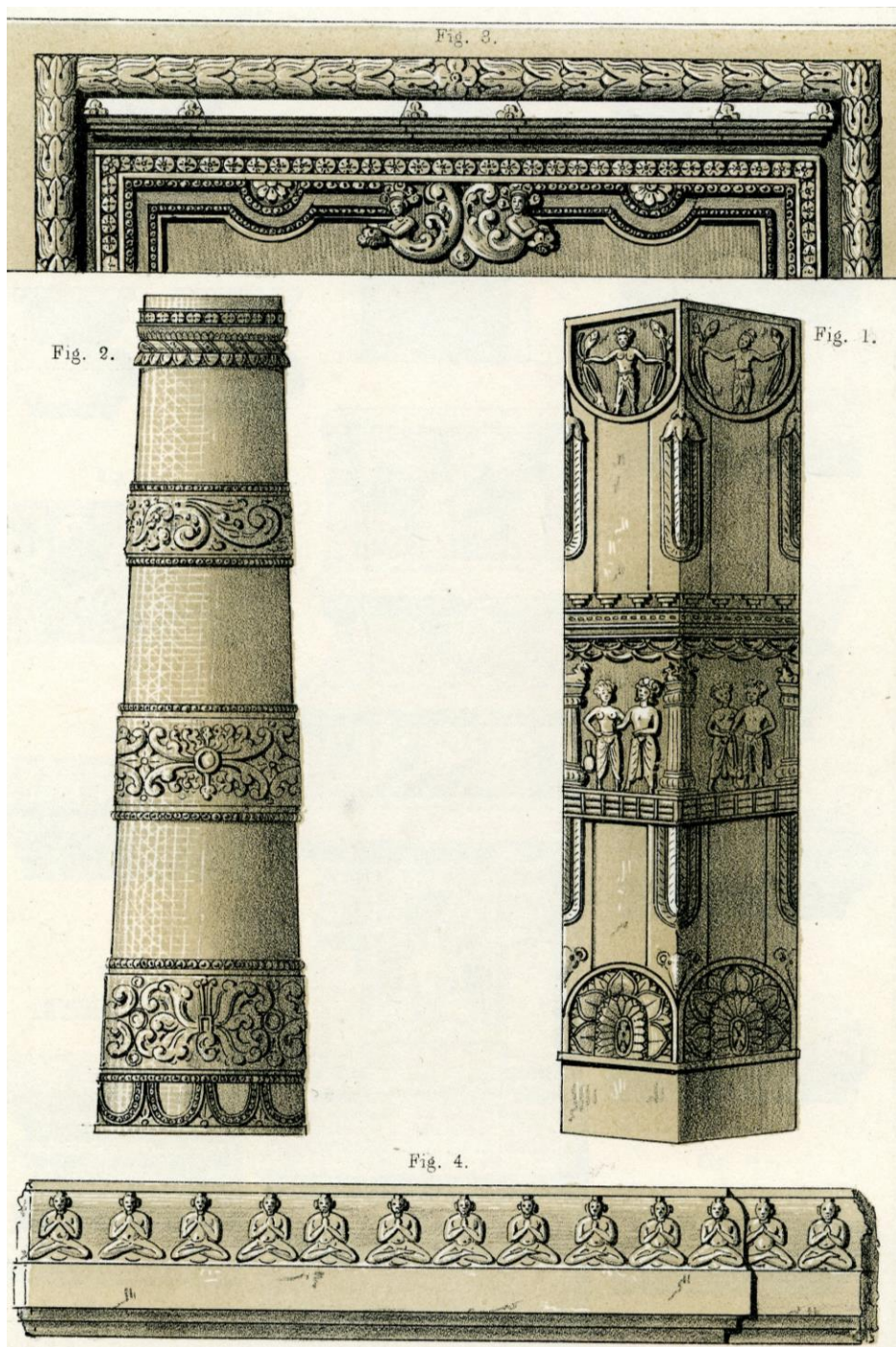


Fig. 4.15 Drawing of Gupta doorway (Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, Plate XXXIII).



Fig. 4.16 Picture of Gupta doorway piled up at BG (Cunningham Collection, British Museum).



Fig. 4.17 Picture of Gupta doorway in the V&A (V&A IS.691 to 696-1883).



Fig. 4.18 Radiant Buddha (V&A)



Fig. 4.19 Radiant Buddha, side view (V&A).



Fig. 4.20 Detail of the Radiant Buddha (V&A).

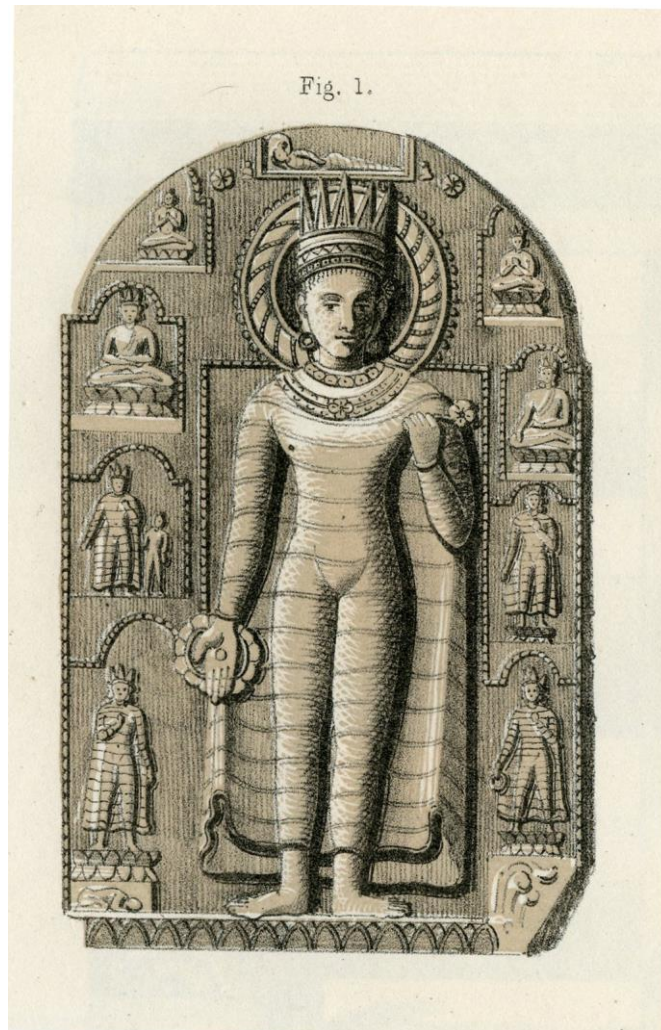


Fig. 4.21 Standing Buddha (Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, Plate XXXIII).



Fig. 4.22 Standing Buddha from BG (BM 1872, 0701.30).



Fig. 4.23 Small stūpa (BM 1887,0717.90).



Fig. 4.24 Stūpa (BM 1880, 4085).



Fig. 4.25 Votive plaque (BM 1887, 0717.147 a-av).



Fig. 4.26 Votive plaque (BM 1887,0717.148 a-b).

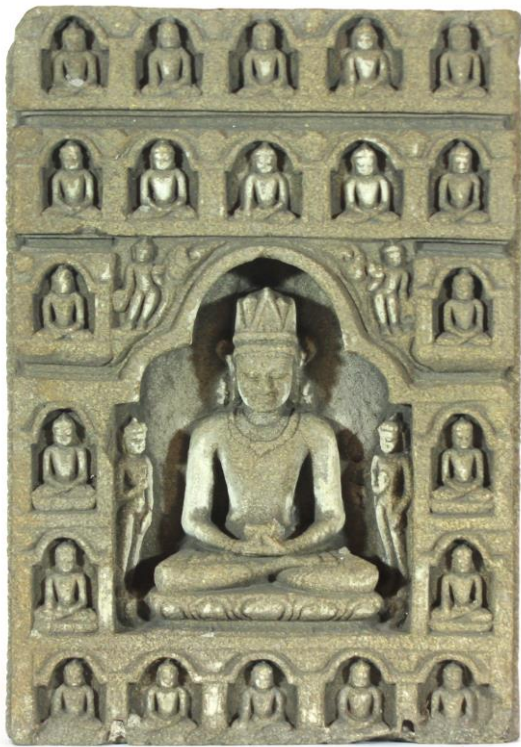


Fig. 4.27 Relief (V&A IS.240-1950).



Fig. 4.28 Relief (V&A MISC.10-1917).

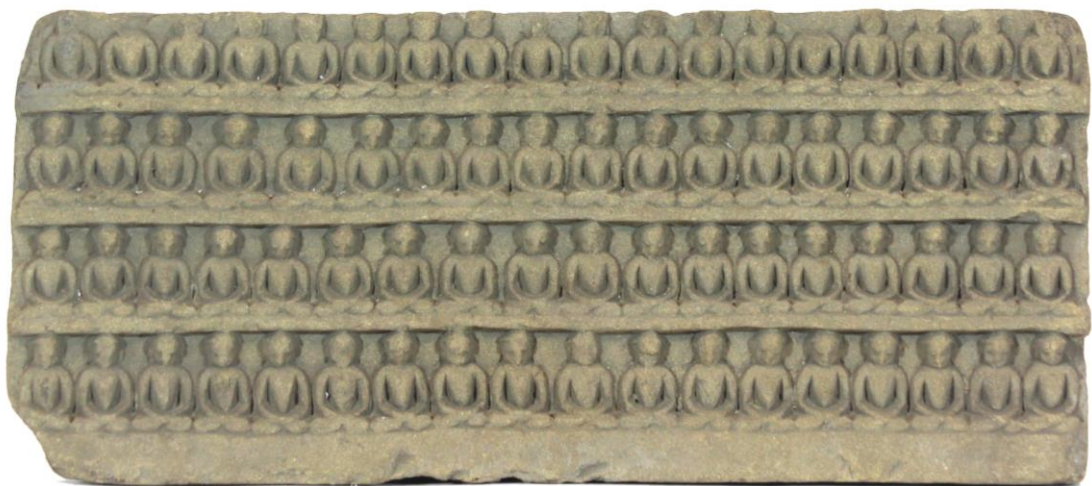


Fig. 4.29 Relief showing rows of seated Buddhas (V&A IS.246-1950).



Fig. 4.30 Mahābodhi model (V&A IS.21-1986).



Fig. 4.31 Wooden Mahābodhi model from Tibet (V&A IS.50-1995).



Fig. 4.32 Mahābodhi model (BM 1922,1215.7).



Fig. 4.33 Mahābodhi model found by Cunningham (BM 1892,1103.1)

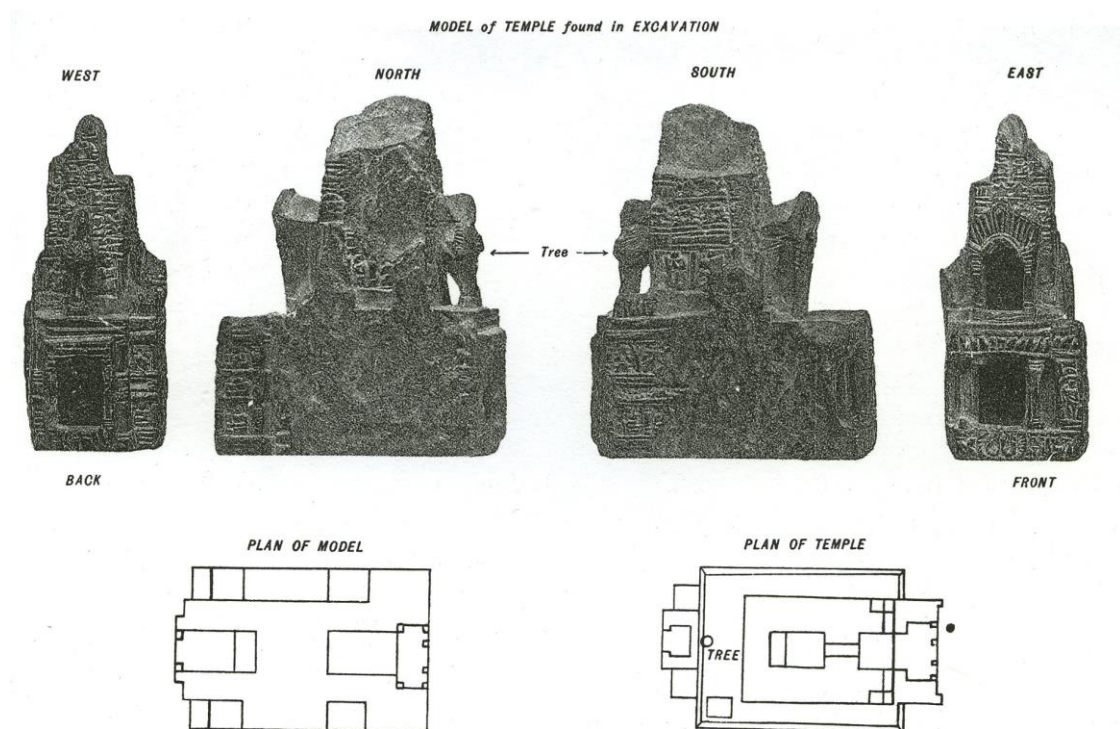


Fig. 4.34 Mahābodhi model and plans, as drawn by Cunningham (Cunningham, Mahābodhi, Plate XVI).